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May 25, 1892.

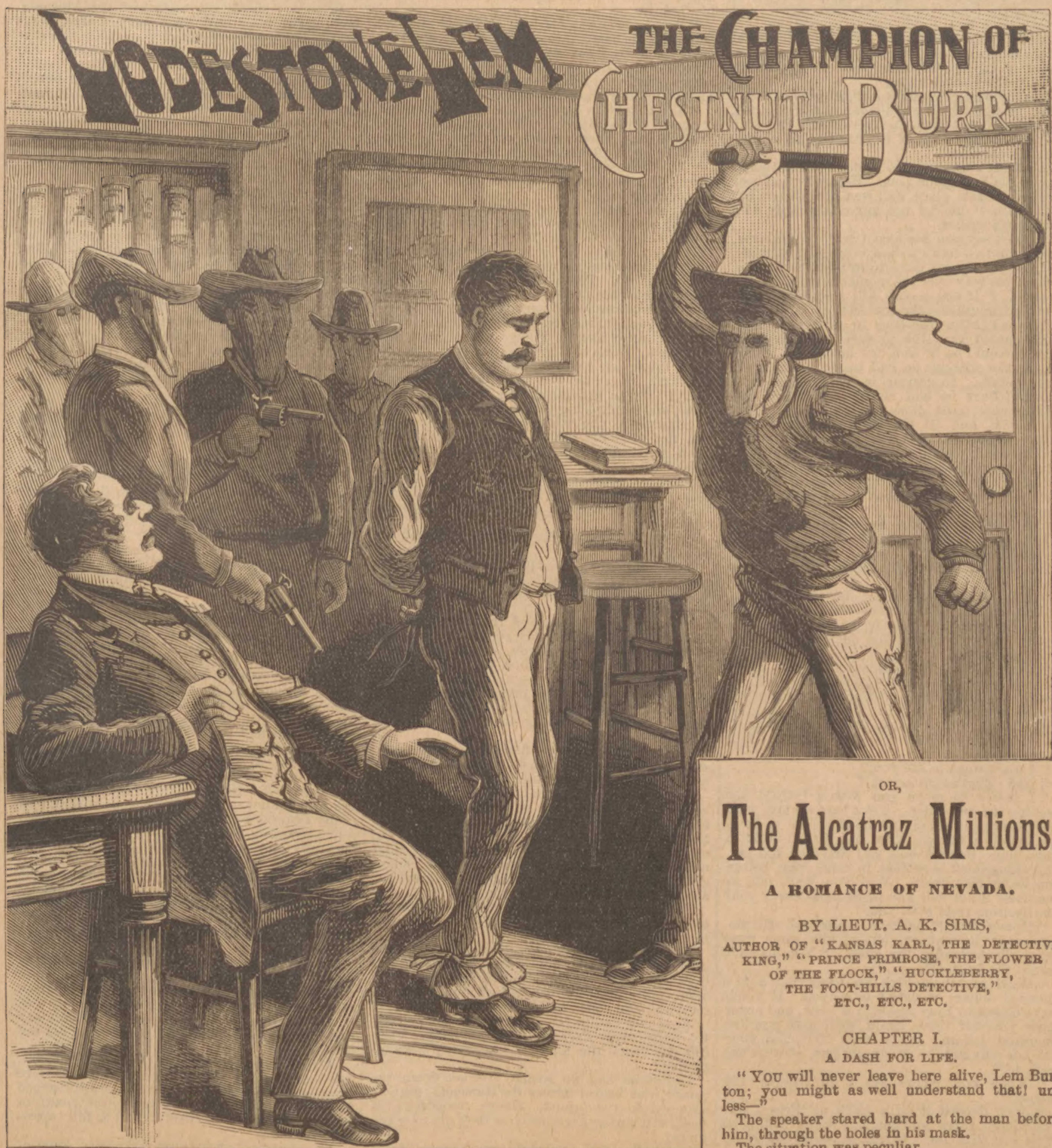
No. 709.

Published Every  
Wednesday.

*Beadle & Adams, Publishers,*  
93 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.  
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LV.



OR,

## The Alcatraz Millions.

A ROMANCE OF NEVADA.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS,  
AUTHOR OF "KANSAS KARL, THE DETECTIVE  
KING," "PRINCE PRIMROSE, THE FLOWER  
OF THE FLOCK," "HUCKLEBERRY,  
THE FOOT-HILLS DETECTIVE,"  
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DASH FOR LIFE.

"You will never leave here alive, Lem Bur-  
ton; you might as well understand that! un-  
less—"

The speaker stared hard at the man before  
him, through the holes in his mask.  
The situation was peculiar.

Lem Burton, known throughout the country  
round as Lodestone Lem, had advanced into the

IN SPITE OF HIS IRON NERVE, LODESTONE LEM SHRUNK FROM THE BITING LASH, AND  
WHITHED VISIBLY, AS BLOW AFTER BLOW DESCENDED.



canyon without suspecting a trick, or dreaming that it was filled with armed and masked enemies.

There was a deserted cabin in the canyon, and toward this cabin he had been directing his steps, drawn thither by a letter received that afternoon. This letter purported to come from a friend—a man whose name and personality were familiar to him—and asked an interview on the subject then uppermost in the minds of all, viz: the claim set up by John Cushman and others to a vast empire of Nevada lands under the old Alcatraz land grant from the Spanish Government.

If the shadows of night had not lain so heavily about the cabin, Lem would have been given warning of his peril by the hoof-marks of horses; but the darkness hid these, and he had walked straight into the lion's mouth.

Not until he had set foot within the cabin did he realize that he had been trapped.

There were eight or ten of these men, all wearing impenetrable hoods, through whose eyelets their gaze seemed to pierce and burn.

"—Unless," the masked man repeated, still threatening Lodestone with the revolver, "you drop your nonsense and abandon Chestnut Burr. We don't intend to stand any such opposition as you're trying to inaugurate."

There was something strangely familiar in the voice, disguised though it surely was. Lodestone was certain he had heard it before. He looked earnestly at the spokesman of the party, running the man over with his keen glances and paying scant heed to the menacing weapon.

Suddenly his eyes flashed. He knew he beheld before him none other than John Cushman, the leader of the league he had so often denominated "The Land Pirates."

This knowledge brought a slight inward trembling, though his outward composure remained. He believed that John Cushman would not stay his hand at any deed, if it promised to accomplish his purpose.

In all the region no one so stood in Cushman's way as did Lodestone Lem. Hence, he had been decoyed to this place, and was now threatened with death if he did not agree to comply with Cushman's wishes.

"I must say you are a cool set!" he declared, seating himself in a careless, crouching attitude, and permitting his gaze to wander in an idle, nonchalant way over the members of this hooded band. "If you should kill me, do you suppose that would end the contest?"

He was fighting for time in which to think. If he should give the promise demanded, he knew it would be broken, for he did not intend to drop the struggle he had begun. Too much was at stake. In casting in his fortunes with Chestnut Burr he had risked all. There was nothing now to be done but go ahead. Duty and honor, and all the finer instincts of his nature, urged him to this strife. He could not go backward; but, just now, to go forward looked perilously like advancing against a pistol ball.

"It would end you!" the masked speaker warned; "and I fancy that would end Chestnut Burr."

"So, I am growing in importance every day! It is a good augury!" and he clasped hands over his knee composedly.

His easy manner irritated the Land Pirate leader.

"You are sorely tempting me to shoot you, Lodestone! You haven't answered my question. Will you give up this business? It will be money in your pocket if you do; and you know the alternative!"

"Money, my dear—plagued if you've given me your name, yet—money makes the world go round. It's like love. We poor mortals would get on hardly without it. I might do a good many things for money, if the boodle was piled high enough. What are the figures? You haven't named them."

"I don't want to kill you."

"No? That's comforting."

"I prefer to move you with a bribe!" not heeding the rejoinder. "Not that we love you, Lodestone; but simply we don't desire to have the bounds of the law after us. Now I want to warn you. Beware how you drive us too far. This thing must be settled, in some way, before you leave this cabin. Will you walk out, as you came in? or will you force us to carry you? The decision rests with you."

"Money talks!" Lodestone asserted, still unconcerned in manner, but at the same time narrowly watching the chief. "You haven't named the figures!"

"We'll put them high, knowing that a few hundred dollars wouldn't move you. If you'll leave Chestnut Burr inside of a week, and never show yourself there again, we'll give you five thousand dollars. It's a steep offer, and your absence may not be worth it; but, that's what we'll do!"

"When and where am I to receive the money?"

"We'll deposit it in a bank at 'Frisco, and you can go there and get it. We're willing to trust you that far. If you agree to leave, we know you'll do so."

Under the circumstances, and from the lips of this man, it was a rare compliment.

Lodestone Lem rose to his feet and began to pace nervously back and forth across the room, the men giving way before him as he walked.

He seemed engaged in a great mental struggle.

"Will you give me a day to think it over?" halting and facing the chief. "You are asking me to do a thing I never done in my life: turn my back on men who have befriended me!"

"Not an hour! Not a minute!" the chief declared, promptly.

The prisoner was studying for an opportunity to escape. He did not intend to accept the five thousand dollars; nor did he mean to be shot for refusing—if he could avoid it.

He saw that a guard had been stationed at the door to prevent his egress—as if ten pairs of watchful eyes were not enough to hold him!

"If time is so precious, why don't you shoot me and done with it?" was his bitter query. "A good many revolver cartridges can be purchased for five thousand dollars! Perhaps it would be the cheapest way? No doubt, if you should be arrested for it, you could take the balance of the five thousand—after paying for the cartridge—and hire any one of a thousand rascally lawyers to acquit every one of you. I've known of the like. He might even be able to hold you up before the eyes of an admiring community as heroes and model citizens."

The masked leader writhed visibly under the stinging words; and Lodestone would have given much to have seen the expression then resting on his features.

Still, he continued his long strides to and fro, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his sack-coat, as if by that act to grease his mental machinery. The watchers might have looked with suspicion on this, if they had not taken the precaution to remove his weapons.

"You'll have to give me a little time to think it over!" emphatically. "You're asking a big thing of me. There's much more than five thousand for me in Chestnut Burr, if I hold on!"

"Five thousand dollars won't be of much benefit to a dead man!" was the leader's significant suggestion.

"True! True! I keep forgetting that I am in danger of being shot. But, give me a half-hour. Only a half-hour!"

The fact seemed to be unnoticed, but he was edging nearer and nearer to the door where the sentinel stood. The pockets of his coat were bulging from the pressure of his clinched fists, and his steps betokened nervous uncertainty.

"It appears to me you are occupying the time without our consent. You've already had ten minutes in which to think it over. Perhaps you don't think we mean business, Lodestone? If you don't, let me tell you you're fooling yourself badly! We've got lariats on the saddles out there, and we'll string you to one of those trees as certainly as you're a living man! The thing will not be found out in a hurry, for it isn't often that any one comes to this forsaken place."

Lodestone could see that the men were whispering together. They had been at this some time, and were showing as much uneasiness as their chief.

He drew out his handkerchief and mopped his heated brow.

There was only a faint light in the room, the lantern having been produced after his capture; but, faint as it was, it served to fully reveal his form and face.

He was somewhat large of frame, though not bulky so, and his face was round and smoothly-shaven, being, in repose, rather handsome, and peculiarly strong. Just now, the feeble light threw his shadow against the walls in grotesque and elephantine proportions.

"Five thousand dollars is a big sum," he declared, again approaching the door in his walk, "but—it won't buy me!"

As these words were fiercely shouted, Lodestone made a desperate dash for the doorway, in which the sentinel was standing.

He realized fully what he was doing. He could not hope to escape without great personal risk. The position of the sentinel was a point in his favor, and he had all along been pleased to see him stationed there. The masked men could not fire at the daring prisoner without endangering the sentinel's life. This Lem counted on, and therefore believed they would not fire.

The suddenness and unexpectedness of this attempt was disconcerting. Its very boldness was in his favor.

With one quick bound, Lodestone reached the door. The startled guard was interposing his body, and had half-uptight his revolver. He went down, however, before Lodestone's impetuous rush, and rolled helplessly on the floor.

No sooner had he fallen, than a shower of pistol balls swept over his prostrate form. They did not reach the man for whom they were intended.

Lodestone had no sooner stricken down the guard, and leaped across the threshold, than he dropped to the ground. Hence, the pistol balls flew over him as harmlessly as they did over the guard.

Loud cries and confused sounds came from within the cabin.

Lodestone had writhed aside, interposing the

heavy logs of the cabin between himself and danger; then he leaped to his feet and sped swiftly away into the darkness.

## CHAPTER II.

### LODESTONE'S VISITOR.

THE infant city of Chestnut Burr had scarcely awakened from its slumbers. It was a scraggy, ragged, straggling village, situated in a wide cactus plain; and as the shadows of the early morning crept away from it, revealing its beauties and defects, an impartial observer would have considered the defects as far outnumbering the beauties.

Not so with Lodestone Lem, who, standing on a slight eminence, looked with loving eyes upon the place so dear to his heart. All his hopes and ambitions were centered in the unprepossessing town.

After making that successful dash from the cabin, he had easily evaded pursuit. He had come to the canyon mounted, and felt safe as soon as he pressed the saddle. The distance from the canyon to Chestnut Burr was long, but he now stood beside his horse, with the town beneath him, and reflected on the stirring scenes of the night.

The desperation of his enemies had been made apparent. He could no longer doubt that their intentions concerning him were of a most deadly character. He had foiled them this time. Could he hope for similar successes, if the battle against the Land Pirates was continued?

In some respects the history of the Alcatraz land grant resembled the history of other land grants made by the Spanish Government in the days of its occupancy of the Southwest. In other respects it was vastly dissimilar. Lodestone Lem believed that there was a fatal defect in the chain of title reaching back to the original grantees. As that defect partook principally of a legal character, it is not necessary to attempt an elucidation of it here. Suffice it to say, that one court, of inferior jurisdiction, had already passed on it, its decision being favorable to the claimants to the land.

John Cushman was the recognized leader of these claimants; and, as he was a man of considerable wealth, and decidedly unscrupulous, not the shadow of a doubt ever rested in the mind of Lodestone that he had used his wealth and influence to secure the decision in favor of himself and his friends.

Now, it chanced that, before the rendering of this decision, Lodestone Lem and others had started the town of Chestnut Burr, and filed upon a number of claims and mines in the near vicinity. The action of the lower court virtually deprived them of their possessions; and they were preparing to fight the case by carrying it to higher authority.

They were confident in the justness of their cause; confident that the Cushman league had not the shadow of a real title; and felt sure of success in the end.

The recent acts of Cushman and his friends went to show that they felt the same way. They recognized Lodestone as Chestnut Burr's greatest champion, and believed that, could they get him out of the way, their partial victory would be completed.

But the friends who had flocked about the champion, when he set up his standard on that cactus plain, did not give to him their respect and confidence in vain. They could not have relied on a man truer to their interests. A glance at him was sufficient to show the stuff of which he was made, and convince any one that he was the soul of honor. The frank, open face, the bold, high forehead, the mild blue eyes, which could twinkle with laughter or hurl darts of fire, all told the same story: that here was a man who could be trusted in any emergency—a man whom his enemies might fear, and his friends "tie to."

His very title of Lodestone clung to him because of his prepossessing and cheery geniality. It was said he last hailed from a town named "Lodestone." However this may have been, the title did not stick to him because of that. In many respects he was a human lodestone himself, attracting and holding friends to him as certainly and surely as the magnetized needle attracts and holds other bits of metal.

As he descended thoughtfully toward the town, walking and leading the horse, his mind was filled with thoughts born of the incidents of the night, and with plans to thwart the scoundrels who had so early shown their villainous hands.

He was resolved that he would not give up the fight. It must be carried on, if carried on, amid constant menace and danger; amid peril from assassins, and from the power of the money that would be arrayed against him. Yet herculean and hazardous as the task seemed, he did not quail.

He had opened an office on the one little street. The building was still guiltless of paint, as were most of those in the town; and, as he approached it, after putting away his horse, the beams of the newly-risen sun seemed to him to fall caressingly about it.

The inhabitants were now astir, and some of the stores were open.

He passed into his office, not anticipating any



business, but for the purpose of secluding himself, that his thoughts might be given freer play.

He was surprised, therefore, when, after a short interval, he heard a light tap on the door, and this surprise was not lessened when he opened the door and saw before him a veiled woman.

She entered the room in response to his invitation, and seated herself in a chair which he sought.

Then she removed her veil, and he beheld Mrs. Flora Cushman, wife of John Cushman, the man who had so lately threatened him with death.

He was scarcely able to conceal his surprise, and to hide the flush that mounted unbidden to his face.

"What can I do for you, madam?" he asked when she had introduced herself.

It was her turn to color. She did not immediately answer, but hesitated and became embarrassed under his earnest gaze.

She recovered quickly, however.

"I came over from Silver Hill last night; but you were away. My husband sent me."

This opening puzzled Lodestone.

"When did you see your husband last, madam?" was his pertinent, though suave inquiry.

"Yesterday morning. He was called away on business. He had already asked me if I would not come over here and confer with you. It's about this claim of yours!"

The clouds rolled from Lodestone's mind. He saw that this woman was not aware of what had transpired during the night. No doubt the scheme to murder him, or force him to leave the place, had been concocted after her interview with her husband.

He replied to her statement, with a questioning uplifting of the eyebrows.

Mrs. Flora Cushman was a rather pretty woman, and she knew it. She was slightly ill at her ease, now,—which somewhat affected the girlish vivacity she usually chose to assume. She was old enough to be the mother of a grown daughter, though she did not look it; a fact on which she prided herself, and which she took frequent occasion to impress on the minds of her acquaintances. It was the girlishness of her charms on which she now relied in her intended assault on this champion of Chestnut Burr.

"I am commissioned to see if something cannot be done to patch up and heal over the strife and bitterness that has been aroused about the Alcatraz land grant," she purred. "Really, Mr. Burton, you cannot afford to fight us the way you are doing. It isn't wise and sensible on your part. Now, is it?"

She bent on him one of her sweetest glances.

"That depends," Lodestone averred. "It may be more money in my pocket to fight the land grant than to take sides with your husband. I think it will be."

"How much would it be worth to you to stop it?"

"More than you or your friends can offer, madam!"

She was plainly disappointed.

"There are other things than money in this world," she persisted, fixing him with a sharp glance.

He waited for her to go on.

"You have seen our daughter, Mr. Burton?"

Lodestone informed her he had never had the pleasure.

"You must see her!" smiling fondly. "Perhaps it is not the proper thing for a mother to dilate on the charms of her daughter. But, there are few such girls in Nevada! You will say so, I am sure, when you have formed her acquaintance."

Even yet he did not comprehend what she was aiming at.

"There are better ways to gain wealth than by fighting," she asserted, giving her head a wise little shake. "The title to the Alcatraz lands, if unclouded, is worth millions. You realize that, Mr. Burton?"

He assented.

"There's no reason why you should not share those millions!" with a gaze that was uncommonly earnest. "Your claims and ours can be reconciled in only one way. A very easy way, for a man like you, I should say!"

"How is that?"

He was becoming interested.

She bowed her head and tapped the carpet somewhat nervously, and demurely with the heel of her tiny boot.

"And a very agreeable way, too! Marry our daughter!"

Lodestone had had a dim suspicion of what was coming, though he had not chosen to reveal it.

"Marry our daughter," she repeated, "and our claims will be united. You will be as much interested, then, in upholding the old Alcatraz title as we are."

A faint smile illumined his round face.

"But the young lady! What has she to say to this? She may not readily accede to such an arrangement."

"Have no fear of that," she assured.

"Does she know you have come on this mission?"

She laughed lightly and again tapped the carpet.

"Most certainly not! But, you need have no fear, if I make the arrangement. You can safely trust me with the carrying out of my part of the contract."

There was such a look of confidence in her eyes that he was half convinced she could do what she stated. He could not know, of course, for he had never seen the young woman in question—had never heard of her in fact, until that morning.

He did not immediately reply, and Mrs. Cushman could not conceal her nervousness. However, she insisted he should not be in a hurry in answering.

"Think it over carefully," she urged. "Such an offer is not made every day; and I assure you, we examined closely into your antecedents before venturing to contemplate the proposed union."

He bowed his head in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"I am sure I ought to feel flattered, and do," he asserted, returning her beaming glance. "I appreciate it fully, I think, and what it means!"

The smile would have faded from her face, if he had proceeded to amplify this last clause. To him, it meant, even as did Cushman's attempt, that they were desperately afraid of him, and sure that if he continued his contest he would be victorious in the end. But he did not say this.

Instead, he remarked, somewhat gravely:

"I am afraid I am hardly worthy of the honor, and would make a poor husband for so charming a lady as your daughter."

"You must not decide until you have seen her!" Mrs. Cushman exclaimed, seeing that he meant a refusal. "You will not say that when you have seen her. There's not a handsomer or a more accomplished young lady in Nevada. Believe me, Mr. Burton, I speak truly when I say so; and you will agree with me when you have seen her."

"Without doubt!" nodding and smiling again.

"Your word is sufficient, Mrs. Cushman. But I am not in a marrying mood, just now. I have too much to think of; too great a press of business; too many irons in the fire!"

She returned to the attack again, not to be beaten so easily. But Lodestone was not to be lured or bribed. He had refused an offer of money the night before. Now he was forced to refuse an indirect offer of marriage.

"It's no use, Mrs. Cushman," smiling at her dismayed face. "I am married to Chestnut Burr, and the honeymoon is not yet over. Would you have me be untrue to my bride?"

"No; it can't be! I am not in the humor for compromises. Your party has won the first victory in the lower court. The case is to be appealed. If you beat me again, perhaps I'll give up. But, I don't intend to be beaten. I think we can elect a judge who will be honest enough to reverse the decision already made."

She saw she had failed, and had risen preparatory to retiring. Her face was pale, and she was trembling, and he spared her further words.

She was no sooner gone, than he placed a tablet on the desk and began to write hastily with a pencil on the soft paper. Chestnut Burr, new and sappy as it was, boasted its weekly paper, *The Chestnut Burr Spine*, of which paper Lodestone Lem was proprietor, editor, compositor, pressman and "devil."

The candidate for the judgeship had not yet been announced, and it was the purpose of the article he was writing to name a man for the position.

His pencil flew over the paper at furious speed, and when the article was finished, he read it carefully, touching up a sentence here and there.

The man whose name he purposed to unfurl to the Nevada breezes had not been spoken to concerning this candidacy, but he knew the flattering character of the announcement would accomplish its object.

"It will fetch him!" he decided. "And he's just the man I want!"

Then he went to the little building which served as the newspaper office, and which held a Washington hand-press, a few cases of type, and other things absolutely needful; and began to "set up" the article.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A SCARED CANDIDATE.

*THE Spine* was a small four-paged paper, and the article filled a column and a half of its editorial page. When this leader was in type, he locked it in a "galley," took a proof of it, and scanned it carefully.

Much time had been consumed, and the dinner-hour was approaching; yet he was oblivious of the fact that he had had no breakfast. There had been many callers at the newspaper office, whom he had turned away that he might complete this work.

The article pleased him. The Hon. Bunkum Landers, whose admirable qualities for the judgeship were so glowingly and fulsomely pointed out, was a man well known to Lodestone. Landers lived on a claim in the edge of

the western foot-hills, within easy riding distance of Chestnut Burr. He was a politician of local note, and had once been a justice of the peace. In addition, he had a multitude of friends, was popular with the "boys," and knew how to run a campaign. All these were considerations not to be overlooked.

It could not be said of him, as of Caesar's wife, that he was "above suspicion." On the contrary, he was noted for his foxiness in matters political. But Lodestone believed that in this instance he could be trusted.

The last stick of "copy" was in type before noon. Mature reflection had convinced Lodestone it was not policy to make mention of the affair in the canyon. He felt he could positively identify only one of the men—John Cushman. He had not even seen Cushman's face, and it might be that his testimony would not go far, should he attempt to identify a man solely by his voice—and a voice which had been given a disguising twist. By coming out boldly and assigning the reasons which might induce Cushman to so threaten him, he could make a strong case; but policy dictated silence for the present. And so the "forms" were locked, and the paper made ready, without mention of the exciting events of the night.

That afternoon he "worked off" the small weekly issue on the muscle-racking hand-press, and placed it in the mails; then turned to other affairs until he should hear from Landers and his friends.

He had not long to wait. The papers were mailed Friday evening; and early Saturday morning Landers appeared at the office in person.

He was a puffy, pompous individual of fifty, with a fringe of beard under his chin, and a round, smoothly-shaven face. He looked more like a prosperous country merchant than the crafty, ambitious politician he really was.

As he presented himself before the door of Lodestone's office, there was on his puffy face a look representative of many mingled emotions. Pleasure, pride, vanity, fear and cowardice were all portrayed. But this was only when he thought no one was observing him. When the door opened and Lodestone showed himself in answer to the rap, an impassivity resembling a mask descended on his broad features.

Lodestone greeted him warmly, and invited him within. He knew the eulogistic editorial was responsible for this call.

In spite of his impassive countenance, Landers could not conceal all traces of anxiety as he stepped into the office; and these traces became more noticeable when the door closed behind them.

"I presume I ought to have welcomed you as the next judge," was Lodestone's smiling observation.

A look of pleasure beamed from the politician's eyes.

"Thank you for that notice, Lodestone; but I'm not elected yet! I only wish I was!"

His uneasiness was increasing, and he was fumbling in one of his pockets, as if to extract something from it.

"But you will be. There can't be any doubt of it. I'll whoop things up for you in the *Spine*, and will see that you have a good, round majority on election day. You may trust me for that, Landers! I know what I'm talking about. You're Chestnut Burr's candidate; and you know yourself that Chestnut Burr never gets left!"

The encouraging words were lost on the politician. He was still fumbling at his coat; and now drew forth a bit of paper, through which a short arrow had been thrust. The arrow was not an elaborate affair, being only a round stick, with a sharpened nail in one end of it.

Landers's eyes had a furtive, restless expression, as he solemnly handed these articles to Lodestone.

"That's the first result of your editorial!" he said, licking his dry lips. "I'm afraid it will be bullets next; and that I'll be the target, instead of my door."

Lodestone's interest was aflame.

He took the articles without a word, gave a glance at the arrow, and proceeded to read what was scrawled on the paper. He did not recognize the handwriting. The notice ran as follows:

#### "TAKE WARNING!"

"The Hon. Bunkum Landers is hereby warned that if he makes the race for the judgeship at the ensuing election, he will do so at his peril. We hear him no ill-will, but we are in dead earnest. The next time we shoot, it will not be a wooden arrow at his door, but a bullet at his heart. We mean business."

There was no signature—nothing to indicate from whom the message came.

In spite of the great control which habit had given him over his features, Landers could not hide the fear which again smote him as Lodestone read the words aloud.

"Bah!" and Lodestone threw as much scorn into the expression as he could. "That's the veriest nonsense! It must have been meant for a practical joke, Landers! Of course you won't pay any attention to it. This is a free country, and every American citizen has the inalienable



right to run for office, if he wants to; and to be elected, if he can get enough votes."

His words took on a jocular tone, as if to make light of the threat.

But Landers's fears were not so easily swept away.

"I'm afraid there's more behind that than you are inclined to think," he averred, with uncommon soberness. "You understand why the threat is made? That is, you have some idea?"

"Yes; if we take it for granted it really is a threat. I can see why a good many men wouldn't desire to have Chestnut Burr set up a candidate for the judgeship. I refer, of course, to their interest in the land case. The court to which the case will be taken is composed of three judges. The term of office of one of those judges expires; and a new man is to be elected in his place. Of the two judges who continue on the bench, one is supposed to favor the claims of Chestnut Burr, and the other the claims of the Land Pirates who are endeavoring to work this Alcatraz steal.

"Now, it's plain—if these suppositions are true—that whichever side elects its candidate for the judgeship, that side will have the better chance to win. For instance, if we of Chestnut Burr should succeed in elevating you to that position, you would feel more kindly toward us than toward the men who had opposed you and done all they could to defeat you."

The politician bowed his head in acknowledgment of the truthfulness of the assertion.

"In saying which," Lodestone continued, "I do not mean to intimate that you would dishonorably favor us. But human nature is human nature, Landers, and there would be no question as to where your sympathies would lie; and little doubt that if the evidence should lie equal in the scales of justice, you would incline toward your friends rather than toward your enemies."

"You've gone to the heart of the thing!" Landers commented. "Those Land Pirates, as you term them, know this as well as you do; and that's why I received the notice. You've tapped the milk in the coconut!"

"But they can't expect to keep us from putting up a candidate! There's where the weakness of the whole thing comes in. If they frighten you off, we'll get another man, and will elect him! I picked out you, because you are better qualified for the position than any one I know of. You can't afford to be scared off the track by an anonymous threat like that. I'm offering you the chance of your life, and you surely see it!"

Landers was fumbling with the paper and arrow, which had been passed back to him. He did feel that it was the one chance of his life. It offered him a position higher than he had ever dreamed of attaining. It would lift him out of his comparative obscurity, and place him on the way to still greater things. The canvass would do that, even if he should be defeated.

Yet there was the threat staring at him from the paper he held in his hand. Could he ignore that and go on? Dared he?

Lodestone Lem knew very well what was passing through the mind of the politician; and he did not lose the opportunity to interpose a few words of reassurance and encouragement.

"Of course you can't reject the offer! I shall issue a call for our convention next week; and there'll be no question as to your receiving the nomination. If necessary, I'll guarantee to make it unanimous.

"Why, you can't retreat now, Landers. Don't you see it's too late?"

He pointed to a large poster hanging on the wall, a copy of some he had printed that morning.

Landers read it with a start of surprise. There was his name and title in glaring black letters, a half a foot long—the poster announcing to the public that the Hon. Bunkum Landers would address the citizens of Chestnut Burr and vicinity, in the City Hall, that night, on the political issues of the day; concluding with the statement that other eloquent orators would grace the occasion with their presence.

The sight of that poster, with his name thus displayed, was like the soft stroke of a hand on the back of a cat. The Hon. Bunkum did not purr with delight, but he probably came as near to it as mortal man can. "THE HON. BUNKUM LANDERS, THE OLD MAN ELOQUENT!" so the poster ran. To be thus characterized was glory, indeed; and in fancy he already heard the wild acclamations of the populace as they drank in his well-rounded periods.

"Of course you can't back down now!" came the soft voice of Lodestone. "It would be suicidal. You could never ask for another favor at the hands of the people of Chestnut Burr. They're anxious to hear you, Landers, and you can't afford to disappoint them."

The politician had not yet ceased contemplating the poster and the wonderful attributes it ascribed to him. He had always thought he could make a speech, but he had never before been called "the old man eloquent!" and he mentally hugged himself with rapture. Had he been given the choosing, he would have picked that very phrase with which to describe himself; and a great hope that it might "stick" overwhelmed him.

No; he could not go back now. He had no desire to be perforated with bullets, but the path to glory had so suddenly and plainly been opened to him that he could not choose but to walk in it, regardless of the danger. It seemed strewn with flowers, even though hissing serpents might line the embowered and rosy path.

Lodestone Lem, closely studying his face, knew that he had won, and hastened to turn the discussion to the approaching meeting. It was best to keep Landers's gaze fixed on the honors to be there obtained, rather than on the threats of their enemies.

When he felt that the politician had been firmly fixed in his new resolve, Lodestone departed to look after other matters that were then demanding his attention; and he did not see Landers again until he met him on the platform in the upper room known as the "City Hall."

Bill notices of the meeting had been distributed far and wide, and an enthusiastic crowd was in attendance. Of course Chestnut Burr turned out to a man, and all the people had been drawn in from the near vicinity. But there were others there whose presence was not so pleasant and desirable.

These came in after the meeting had been called to order, and the politician had begun his speech. They belonged to the Cushman crowd, were heavily armed and had been drinking, and were obviously bent on a row.

Landers bit off one of his happiest sentences in the middle, and seemed about to sit down, as he noted their threatening manner. His face was pale, and his sturdy legs plainly shook.

Lodestone hastened to cover the orator's confusion by rising and instructing the new-comers where to find seats, thus giving Landers time to regain his mental equilibrium. Still noting the pallor on the politician's countenance, he handed him a glass of water, and whispered:

"Brace up, old boy! We've got 'em foul; and they know it!"

His cheery words temporarily had the desired effect. Landers resumed his speech, and was swinging along in true oratorical style, when a pistol exploded, and the bullet imbedded itself in the upper window ledge back of his head.

The orator collapsed instantly, sunk weakly into a chair, and looked over the crowd with a white and scared face.

Great confusion was reigning at the point from which the shot had come; and a number of men had gathered about the drunken ruffian and were hurrying him from the room.

There could be no doubt he was one of Cushman's men; and Lodestone Lem believed the shot had been fired, not with murderous intention, but solely for the purpose of frightening Landers.

He was on his feet in an instant, bawling to the audience to keep their seats, and assuring them the firing had been accidental.

The ruffian was hustled out, and the crowd remained; but Lodestone clearly saw that Landers could not go on with his address. All the ideas with which he was bubbling over but a few moments before had been shaken out of him. His white face had a vacant, starey look which showed that his wits had gone wool-gathering.

However, Lodestone was equal to the emergency. He took up the speech just where Landers had dropped it, and with fiery, impetuous eloquence held the crowd as immovable as statues. He referred wittily to the incident which had just disturbed the meeting, smoothed over with happy words the politician's weakening and did this in so neat and telling a way that it made Landers seem really something of a hero.

Then he swung into a resistless torrent of words that scathed and seared and burnt, and lashed his enemies with telling effect. Such a speech had never been heard in that part of Nevada, and at its close, to such a pitch had his hearers been wrought, that they lifted him bodily on their shoulders and bore him triumphantly about the room amid a chorus of yells that made the building rock.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE BITING LASH.

FEARING that Landers might dislike to leave the place unattended, Lodestone Lem accompanied him at the close of the meeting, taking him by the arm and steering him safely through the crowd.

Landers was indeed much shaken up; so much so, that he feared to start for home through the darkness, though he had a horse in waiting to carry him. He seemed to prefer to go with Lodestone to the latter's office.

"I'm glad I'm safe out of that hall!" he averred, mopping his face as he seated himself in one of Lodestone's easiest chairs. "I don't know whether I want to be a candidate for judge or not. Politics is too risky a business in this country."

He strove to assume an easy, jocular air, but failed miserably.

"Think it would be healthier to go back East and live as a private citizen, eh?"

"The paths of glory lead, but to the grave!" Landers quoted, fanning himself vigorously to hide his nervousness. "I don't know that I

care to be elected to fill a hole in the ground just yet!"

"There isn't the slightest danger!" and Lodestone laughed at his lugubriousness. "The good die young, my dear Landers, and you're not good. There's another quotation that might fit, though, since you're handling quotations: 'Death loves a shining mark!' I reckon the drunken fellow they ejected from the hall couldn't have borne that name!"

"Don't!" Landers pleaded, putting out his hands. "You give me the creeps. I'm not a shining mark, and the fellow's name wasn't Death—"

"No; it was Jim Jones!"

"There you go with your everlasting banter!" the politician whined. "Can't you let up? I want to know how I'm to get home! That's what's bothering me, now!"

"You might ride!"

"And be shot from my horse! No; thank you."

Landers would not go home; so they sat in the office until a very late hour, discussing matters pertaining to the politician's proposed candidacy.

The further Landers got from the disturbing incident of the night's meeting, the more cheerful he became.

On coming away from the hall, he was almost inclined to back down from the race, if he had not fully made up his mind to do so, as Lodestone could plainly see; but two or three hours' talk with the latter so restored Landers's firmness and confidence, that he expressed a willingness to go on, in spite of the peril.

The good effect of all this was destined to be dissipated however, before the night closed.

The hour was extremely late—in fact it was verging on morning, and nearly all the citizens of Chestnut Burr were sound asleep in their beds—when a series of ominous and thundering raps was given to the door of Lodestone's office.

The effect was electrical. Both men leaped from their chairs; Lodestone bewildered and surprised, and Landers white-faced and frightened. Neither had heard the sound of an approaching footstep.

Before they could make up their minds what to do, or what the summons meant, the raps were repeated. They were clearly made with a revolver butt, and were determined and imperative.

Lodestone drew a weapon from his pocket, and strove to glance through the window to ascertain whom this nocturnal caller might be; but the darkness was too great.

"Who's there?" he questioned, with a premonition of impending ill.

"Don't let him in," Landers urged. "Turn the key in the lock."

It was an unfortunate speech, for it was overheard. In all probability, up to that moment the handler of the heavy pistol supposed the door to be securely fastened. Now he turned the knob and thrust the door wide open.

The cone of light that streamed out into the gloom revealed fully a dozen armed and masked men, at sight of whom, Landers fell back into his chair with a gasping cry. He did not doubt that the authors of the warning message were before him, and had come there for his especial benefit.

Before Lodestone could interpose, the leader of the masked band sprang lightly through the doorway, his followers crowding closely at his heels. Lodestone was borne backward by their rush, and a moment later they were all within the room, with the door closed behind them.

There was something ominous and significant in their very silence. With the exception of their leader, not one of them spoke. He did not utter many words, but these were sufficient to reveal to Lodestone that he was the same masked individual who had threatened him in the canyon, and whom he believed to be John Cushman.

The windows of Lodestone's office were curtained with heavy blinds, so there was no chance that the presence and acts of these men might be witnessed from the outside.

"We thought we gave you sufficient warning last night to learn you some sense," the masked leader hissed, "but we see we were mistaken; and so we are here!"

They paid no heed to Landers, who was shivering in his chair, unable to move or speak.

Lodestone faced them firmly enough, though his fears were great. These men had been desperate enough to seek his life last night. He had disregarded their warnings. What would they do to-night?

He was not left long in doubt.

The leader motioned to two of his men, and these sprang forward and seized Lodestone. Lem did not resist, realizing the utter folly of so doing. These men could kill him if they so desired, for he was wholly in their power. Calls and struggles would be alike useless.

As soon as seized, his hands and feet were pinioned with strong cords; then the leader drew a whip from beneath the folds of his all-concealing cloak. He gave the whip a cut through the air to test it, the lash whistling and snapping viciously.

"Perhaps you thought we were joking last



night!" looking at him coldly through the holes in the mask. "We have come to show you how deadly in earnest we are. You have gone on, in spite of our wishes. Maybe we can take a little of the fight out of you!"

He gave the whip another cut and then brought it down with all the strength of his strong right arm on the shoulders of his enemy, whose coat had been removed for the purpose.

In spite of his iron nerve, Lodestone Lem shrank from the biting lash, and writhed visibly, as blow after blow descended. But he did not cry out or plead for mercy. He knew that both would be useless, and that they would be hailed by those men as signs of weakness. But his face became absolutely ashen in its deathly pallor, and his lips set and his teeth ground as the storm of blows fell. It was a humiliation he had never before been forced to endure.

"There!" exclaimed the masked leader, ceasing only when his arm became tired. "Maybe that will be a lesson to you! If it isn't, there's more in the same shop. You've got to understand that we don't propose to bear with this nonsense of yours, and that the sooner you drop it the healthier it will be for you! Next time, it will be something worse than whipping!"

Lodestone made no reply to the brutal speech.

"And as for you," turning to the shivering politician, "if you don't look sharp, you'll get a dose of the same medicine!"

Then the maskers retreated from the room, leaving Landers to cast off Lodestone's bonds at his leisure.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### BEARDING THE LION.

SILVER HILL was near the home of John Cushman, the leader of the Land Pirates. It was a mining-town, as its name implied, and Cushman had many friends and backers there.

Into this town, Lodestone Lem resolved to go. He would make a speech in its public hall, thus virtually bearding the lion in his lair.

Another week had passed, bringing its issue of the *Chestnut Burr Spine*; without, however, any mention of the deeds of the masked ruffians.

Their last demonstration had almost crushed the spirit out of the Hon. Bunkum Landers. That doughty individual had retired to the isolation of his claim, and had only once been seen on the streets of Chestnut Burr since the night of the meeting. Nevertheless, in getting up the bills for the speaking at Silver Hill, Lodestone had inserted Landers's name as that of one of the orators.

Landers had written that he would not go, whereat Lodestone smiled grimly and went on with own preparations.

He had two reasons for wishing to visit Silver Hill. The first was that he desired to make a speech there, and the second was a wish to call at Cushman's residence.

He was fully satisfied Cushman never dreamed that the tones of his disguised voice had discovered him. Cushman was careful and long-headed, and could but feel that such tactics would not redound to his credit, should they become known.

The effects of the biting lash had been only to increase Lodestone's bitterness. They had not for a moment deterred him from the course he had marked out. He deeply felt the humiliation of the disgrace to which he had been subjected. The stinging blows had left their marks on his heart, as well as on his back.

John Cushman had counted without his host, however, in supposing that Lodestone Lem would be frightened into compliance with his wishes. Had he but known it, he had chosen the very course to render Lodestone more determined and obstinate.

"They can kill me," Lodestone had declared to the politician, with flashing eyes, "but they can't scare me or swerve me! I've gone into this thing determined to see it through; and I will, if I die for it! If I shouldn't, I could never again look in the faces of the friends who have so generously been assisting me!"

It was this spirit that stirred Lodestone to visit Silver Hill.

There was another cause quite as potent.

Ever since the visit of Mrs. Flora Cushman, he had had an insane desire to look on the face of the girl whose hand had been so strangely offered him in marriage. It was a foolish curiosity, he acknowledged, yet he could not resist it. Very likely he did not try to resist it.

He had learned that the girl's name was Lillie; that she had only been in Silver Hill a day or two, and had scarcely been seen;—and that was all he knew. Whether or not she was as beautiful and accomplished as her mother had claimed, no one could say. He resolved to supply these points himself.

Hence, as he took his way to Silver Hill to address the meeting that had been so widely advertised, his thoughts dwelt more on Lillie Cushman than they did on the speech he expected to make.

Yet he was hardly prepared for the vision that greeted him, when he entered John Cushman's home.

He had meant to call for John Cushman, and on ringing the door-bell had even framed his request for utterance. He had expected the

door to be opened by a servant. Instead, he saw before him a young woman, whom his keen intuitions told him was the very one who had so occupied his thoughts.

"Father is not at home," she said, in answer to his inquiry. "Will you step in?"

He availed himself of the privilege, before saying:

"And your mother? For I presume you are Miss Cushman."

She acknowledged the correctness of his surmise; stated that her mother was absent; whereupon he produced his card, and hastened to introduce himself.

He felt he was an intruder, but declared mentally he would not go until he had had a talk with this young lady. He had craved this opportunity, and it was not to be lost.

Lodestone was a good conversationalist, and could make himself very agreeable when he tried; and on this occasion he tried very hard.

He began by regretting the absence of her parents, whom he assured her he desired to see, and then drifted into a general talk, that amounted to little of itself, though it was sparkling and charming.

The girl's beauty and intelligence won him at once. He was fascinated by her winning conversation and engaging manners.

It was also quite plain that he had made a favorable impression on her. She had only heard of him—never before had seen him; and she found him not as black as he had been painted.

The rambling talk—enjoyed alike by both—lasted for nearly an hour, though to Lodestone it did not seem a fourth of that time had been consumed; and when he left the house, he went as if treading on air, and with his brain on fire.

"She's an angel!" was his mental ejaculation. "What haven't I lost by not seeing her before?"

He stopped short before completing the thought.

He was fighting the father of the girl, whom he had just demominated an "angel," and that father was his bitterest foe! Ay! and had wielded the lash that had so cruelly cut and gashed his back!

His brain became sick and dizzy as he went on his way. His ideas were confused and incoherent. A sudden realization of his situation had dawned on him. He felt he could not live without this girl. He must win her! He would win her! But what of her father, and of the fight now in progress?

He moaned as he reflected on the speech he was to make that night. He had cherished some bitter and burning sentences which he meant to hurl publicly at the head of John Cushman. Could he utter them now? Could he continue the contest in which he had so steeped himself? He felt that he must; though he quailed from contemplating what the result might be.

He was in no mood for idle conversation with acquaintances, so sought a retired place, where he might ponder over these questions undisturbed.

"I will win her!" he asserted, so fiercely that the sound of his own voice startled him. "I will win her! Yes; and I'll beat John Cushman and his Land Pirates!"

So tumultuous were his emotions throughout the day, that he was not in his usual condition for speaking, when the hour for speaking arrived. But the old spell—the inspiration that moves every true orator—came back to him when he beheld the sea of faces, and his words and ideas flowed as freely as before.

It was a speech that made him friends in this home of his foes, and captured and silenced enmity and criticism.

He went directly to his room at the hotel, as soon as he could decently withdraw, and was immeasurably surprised when the card of John Cushman was brought to him.

He had not anticipated such audacity, yet he had been as audacious in entering Cushman's house.

He consented for Cushman to be shown up, remembering that Cushman had no knowledge of the fact that his identity had been discovered.

When conducted into the room, the leader of the Land Pirates was as smooth and oily as silk. His sentences were honeyed with friendly compliments.

Lodestone invited him to a seat, resolved not to be outdone in politeness.

He was not long left to wonder concerning Cushman's mission.

"You're too smart a man, Lodestone, to throw away your talents the way you are doing," Cushman began. "In making this fight for Chestnut Burr, of course you're after money. I should think you'd be sensible enough to drop it, if a way was opened for you to make more money by doing so than by continuing as you are."

There was not a hint of the threats which Cushman had made as the disguised leader, and no mention of Lodestone's visit to the house.

These things Lodestone did not fail to notice; but he kept still, and allowed Cushman to continue:

"It's money we're all after, Lodestone, no matter what fine theories we may spin, or what

unselfish professions we may make in public! Now, I can show you how you can make ten times as much by dropping this fight as you can by keeping it up."

Lodestone Lem was thinking of Lillie Cushman, and wondering if her father intended to repeat the proposition made by Mrs. Cushman.

"We're sure to beat you in the end, in this Alcatraz land business, but it's going to cost us a good deal. I'm willing to confess that. You have the power to stop it. The men you have gathered about you would do nothing if you did not lead them. If you will stop it, we'll give you one-tenth interest in the Alcatraz land grant, which is worth more, ten times over, than you'll ever make out of Chestnut Burr."

"I can't do it!" Lodestone asserted, in imagination feeling Cushman's stinging lash as he spoke.

"That is your final answer?"

"It is my final answer!"

Again Cushman went over his tempting offer, amplifying it in detail to make it more alluring. Lodestone was not to be shaken.

"Then, have a care!" Cushman growled, as he rose to depart.

He had said nothing about Lodestone's call at the house; nothing about offering him the hand of his daughter in marriage; nothing about the scenes in Lodestone's office and in the wild canyon.

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### A CLEVER PLOT.

THE convention which was held at Chestnut Burr the next day, according to a prearranged understanding, selected the Hon. Bunkum Landers as its candidate for the judgeship.

It required much persuasion on the part of Lodestone Lem to induce Landers to finally accept this nomination. It had been accomplished through Landers's love of applause. Flattery, applied as Lodestone knew how to apply it, the politician could not resist.

The news was speedily borne to Silver Hill, and, as soon as John Cushman heard it, he took his way thoughtfully homeward.

As has been already intimated, his residence was not in Silver Hill. It was nearly a mile from the town, situated within spacious grounds, and easily reached by a good road. The country about it possessed much of its primitive wildness. Vast ranges, with stretches of chaparral, extended backward from the house, and these were utilized by Cushman as grazing grounds for his herds.

Cushman was much troubled. So far, neither bribes nor threats had been able to move the chief enemy from their path. Lodestone had gone straight on with his plans, in spite of everything.

Cushman would not have been much disturbed by these actions of Lodestone, if he had not known how weak was the hold he and his friends had on the Alcatraz land. That hold had been obtained by fraud, and they would, he feared, be forced to relinquish it, if the fight was kept up.

Cushman met his wife in one of the corridors, and requested to see her in the parlor, as he had something of importance to talk over.

She knew from his anxious look to what it had reference; and followed him into the parlor, curious to learn what new turn fortune had taken.

"The fool has been nominated!" Cushman bitterly announced.

It did not seem necessary for him to explain to his wife who the "fool" was. They had talked over their impending perils too often to render explicitness necessary.

"And after the warning I gave him! I thought the note fired into his door would scare him out of it, to say nothing of the whipping administered to Lodestone. But it seems it hasn't had that effect!"

"What is to be done?" was the strained inquiry.

"Hanged if I know! I thought likely you could tell me."

Mrs. Cushman had more brains than she was usually given credit for, and Cushman relied much on her womanly shrewdness.

"Lodestone is the man to strike."

The annoyed look on Cushman's face increased.

"What more can I do than I have done? He won't stop, unless he's killed; and that's rather risky. Bribery has no effect! He even sneered at your offer."

A hot flush suffused her cheeks.

"I have been thinking about that," she averred. "There are more ways to catch a fly than one. You've tried vinegar and I've tried molasses. Suppose we plan a trap that he'll walk into of his own accord?"

"Can it be done?" brightening at even this faint suggestion.

"I don't know, of course; but it can be tried. If it fails, we won't be any worse off than we are now."

He looked questioningly at her.

"If we should give a ball, and should send him an invitation, do you suppose he would attend?" she queried.

"I'm afraid it's doubtful. He might."



"Wouldn't he, if the invitation was sent to him by Lillie?"

Cushman nodded approvingly.

"It's a good idea," he confessed.

"If, at the invitation of the spider, he walks into the parlor of his own free will," she continued, "the spider ought to be able to so weave him with silken threads that he can't get out again. Don't you think so?"

"But can you get Lillie to write such an invitation?"

A sly look came into her face.

"Trust me for that, John Cushman! I've some plans that will surprise you by-and-by."

She did not deign to enlighten him; but added:

"If he comes here, I think there can be no question that he will fall in love with the girl. It won't make any difference whether she falls in love with him or not."

"But it will!" Cushman declared. "I shouldn't feel safe until he was married to her. That would stop the fight, certainly. I doubt if anything short of it would."

"You are not a student of human nature, John Cushman!" she affirmed. "If you were, you wouldn't say that. Get a man madly in love with a woman, and he would sell his soul to win her. That's the result of my limited observation."

"I presume you are speaking from experience!" the faintest suggestion of a sneer in his tones.

She colored a little, but did not answer him.

"If Lodestone Lem falls in love with Lillie, he cannot afford to fight her father. That would be the poorest way in the world for him to hope to win her. Trust me, Lodestone isn't a fool!"

Slowly Cushman was won to a full belief in the success of the scheme. For an hour or more they sat there, discussing it in all its details. Many suggestions were made that are not here set down; many changes from the simple plan first proposed; and at the close of the interview, Cushman returned to town, in hearty sympathy with all his wife had said, and stronger in his belief in the ultimate triumph of the Land Pirates.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE TRAMP COMPOSITOR.

In due season, Lodestone Lem received through the post an invitation to the ball to be given at the Cushman residence near Silver Hill. It was not a formal, printed affair, but was in a woman's handwriting, and was signed Lillie Cushman.

Lillie Cushman had scarcely been out of his waking thoughts since the hour of his meeting with her. He had planned to win her by day, and dreamed of her by night; but these plans and dreams were filled with many forebodings. His fight against John Cushman seemed an insuperable bar to any further intercourse with her.

Therefore, his delight and joy were great, when he tore open the dainty envelope and perused the note which it contained. He had never dared to hope for such a favor.

He was alone in his office, and he pressed the scented note to his lips again and again, before carefully folding it away. Every word of its contents was transcribed on his brain as with a point of fire—every line and curve of the delicate feminine chirography.

He never dreamed of refusing to accept the invitation. He would attend that ball, and he would see Lillie Cushman! Perhaps he might obtain another hour of delightful conversation with her!

If his infatuation for the fair girl had been great before, it was if possible increased. Her beauty haunted him, like a constant vision. The words of the note sung themselves over and over in his ears to the music of her voice. What might lie beyond his next meeting with her he did not stop to question. He would be true to Chestnut Burr; but he would win Lillie Cushman! He had already resolved on that.

His various duties had pressed him hard of late. So hard that he could no longer give his personal attention to the mechanical work of getting out the *Spine*, and this work he had delegated to a tramp compositor who had strayed into the town.

The compositor, who had given his name as Barnum Yates, was not, as may readily be imagined, a man of prepossessing appearance, but he knew how to "stick" type, and was handy about the office.

Yates had a sallow, sinister face, covered with an unkempt growth of beard, and peering, prying eyes; and these eyes looked slyly at Lodestone Lem, as the latter galloped away toward Silver Hill for the purpose of attending the Cushman ball.

"Look at that git-up!" Yates sneeringly grumbled. "He thinks he's a Jim dandy! Rigged out like a city dude, all fuss and feathers, an' scent-bottles an' sich!"

He gave a sniff of disgust, and looked at his own shabby garments.

"I reckon he feels like a knight, a-ridin' away to see his own true love. He won't feel so gay when I begin to milk him!"

He glanced scornfully about the office, and began to roll down the sleeves of his dirty shirt. There was work to be done, but Barnum Yates did not intend to do it just then. He had other tasks more desirable to him, and night was approaching.

"I kin throw in a few sticks after a while an' make up fer what time I lose," he muttered. "That feller wouldn't know, when he gits back, whether I've been doin' anythin' or not. An' he calls himself a typol!"

It was plainly evident that he did not highly regard Lodestone's abilities in the type-setting line.

It was past mid-afternoon when he left the office. His appearance on the street attracted no attention, nor did the fact that he went straight toward the nearest saloon. Whisky had been the bane of his existence, and for him to have gone on a "tear" at any moment would not have occasioned the slightest surprise.

But Barnum Yates was not in search of the flowing bowl at that hour.

He visited the saloon, ran over its interior with his furtive eyes, and again sought the street. He did not find what he wanted there; and, after a further search in other places, returned to the office.

He locked the door after him, and drew the blinds so that no one could see him from the outside. Then he approached Lodestone's desk. He had a bunch of keys in one pocket of his ragged trousers. He selected a key from the bunch and applied it to the lock of the desk. It proved a fit, and he lifted the desk-lid and beheld the contents.

These consisted of papers. Most of them were neatly arranged in heaps and tied with bits of ribbon or cord.

He ran through the loose ones first, and not finding what he wanted, untied one of the bundles and looked through it.

Each bundle he served similarly, retying it carefully after examining it. But, whatever he was looking for, it was manifest that he did not discover it, for a frown of disappointment settled on his sallow face.

Finally he rummaged among a lot of letters, and selecting some of them, carefully scanned their contents.

"Cuss the luck!" he growled, tossing the letters down in disgust. "I thought mebbe I'd find somethin' about it here."

His search had been a failure, and he again returned to the street.

This time he beheld the man for whom he had previously looked. This was an ex-cowboy known as 'Frisco Ben. Frisco had been in the habit of haunting the office of the *Spine*, and it was there that the tramp had formed his acquaintance.

"The boss is gone, an' I'm out fer a lark!" Yates ejaculated, clasping Frisco warmly by the hand. "I don't work unless I hev to. What d'ye say to a guzzle? I've got the spondulicks right hyer to pay fer it with. The boss got kind-hearted yisterday an' paid me off."

He slapped one of his pockets in a way to make the keys and coins jingle.

Frisco Ben did not regard the tramp highly, but he could not resist the invitation. Liquor obtained by a tramp's money was likely to taste as good as if secured by the coin of a king. So he reasoned and followed Yates into the saloon.

Yates seemed to have an abundance of money, and he scattered it with a lavish hand. Frisco imbibed once; this first drink called for a half-dozen more; and before the coming of night, he was "half seas over," as a sailor might express it.

To get him in this condition was what Yates had been working for. The ex-cowboy mellowed under the influence of the potent spirits, and became very confidential and glib of tongue.

"The boss is a fine man," the tramp declared, when they were together on a deserted street, half-shadowed by the coming darkness.

"Right ye air!" Frisco confessed. "There hain't a ficer!"

"He's a-flyin' high, now," Yates continued, "but I've hearn tell how there was once a time when he wasn't any richer than we be. Not so rich, likely; an' he had to keep out of sight nearly all the time fer fear the cops 'u'd nab him. That was down in Frisco."

If the cowboy had not been so drunk, he would have noticed the peculiar questioning tone in which this was put. But his customary carefulness and caution had vanished.

It was well to know that Frisco Ben was on intimate terms with Lodestone. He had come with him to the place, and had been one of Lodestone's right-hand men ever since. There could be little doubt, therefore, that if any dark secrets were connected with Lodestone's past life Frisco knew something concerning them.

This was the line of reasoning which the tramp had adopted.

"He used to live in 'Frisco, didn't he?" Yates inquired, in the most off-hand manner.

"Yes," Ben admitted. "Both on us lived there a spell. That's how I got my handle."

"An' did he really ever hev to hide away from the cops?"

"Well, yes; I may say he did, in a manner!"

You see, it was this way. He was arrested fer a murder which he didn't do, an' which couldn't be proved ag'in' him when the time come fer tryin' to prove it. The feller killed was a sailor named John Colby."

Yates drew a deep breath.

"An' there was a robbery, too, wasn't they?"

"So 'twas charged; though they couldn't prove it!" this last with dogged savageness.

"A murder an' a robbery! No wonder he hid away from the cops!"

"He didn't hide away because o' that!" Frisco asserted. "Twas on another 'count."

"An' what was that?"

The cowboy wheeled and looked sternly at his interlocutor.

"Hanged ef I don't b'lieve you're a-tryin' to pump me! Ef I thought you was—"

His manner was withering, and the tramp quailed before the fire of his awakened suspicion.

"Nothin' o' the kind!" Yates grumbled. "Why should I? We'll drop the subjec', if it riles ye."

"Drop it, then!" Frisco Ben commanded.

The tramp locked his arm within that of the irate cowboy.

"Come! Come!" he urged. "What's the use of makin' a row? We'll hev the cops after us, if we do. I don't keer nothin' about this 'Frisco business, an' if you think I do, you're away off. My mind jist happened to run in that direction. I used to live down in 'Frisco, myself."

"You did?" said Ben, not yet mollified. "I reckoned you lived mostly on the road!"

It was a direct slap in the face, but the tramp took no notice of it.

"I do hit the road onc't in a while," he confessed, after a time of thought. "Most giner'ly in the spring, though, when the blue-birds begin to warble. 'Long about spring time my blood begins to b'ile, an' then I can't stay in a house."

He was steering Frisco Ben back to the saloon, knowing he could obtain no further information from him; and when he got him there, he left him and returned to the office.

"It's jis' what I've been wantin'," he muttered, as he slouched with bowed head along the street. "Puttin' that with what I already know makes out a clear case. I think I've got the cinch on Mr. Lodestone Lem, an' you bet I'll take advantage of it!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A MYSTERY.

LODESTONE LEM did not ride immediately to Cushman's, but went first to Silver Hill, where a conference was to be held with some friends concerning the political situation.

This detained him longer than he had anticipated, and when, in the darkness, he approached the Cushman residence, over the firm road leading from the town, he was made aware, by the number of horses tethered here and there, that he was by no means the first-comer.

The house was brilliantly illuminated, and through the open doors and windows he could hear the sounds of voices, and see men and women moving about in the rooms. In fancy, he pictured Lillie Cushman, elegantly attired and radiant in her beauty, receiving and welcoming her guests with the graciousness of a queen.

He tethered his own horse by the side of the others, and made his way up the path to the house.

To his disappointment, Mrs. Cushman met him at the door. She gave him most cordial greeting.

"You have never met my daughter, I believe," she said, as she saw and interpreted his roving glances. "She is in the parlor, and I dare say will be happy to form your acquaintance."

She led the way toward the parlor, and Lodestone followed with wildly throbbing pulses, not having been given time to explain how and under what circumstances he had had the pleasure of meeting Miss Lillie.

A number of guests were in the room when they entered it, and conspicuous among them was a richly-dressed young woman, who seemed to be a center of interest. Lodestone only gave her a glance, but it was sufficient to reveal that she was of a dark, olive complexion, and extremely pretty. He was looking for Lillie, whom he did not see.

To this young lady Mrs. Cushman led him.

"Mr. Burton, allow me to present my daughter, Miss Lillie; Lillie, this is Mr. Burton, whom you have so often heard your father speak of as Lodestone Lem."

Lodestone looked into the dark eyes and lovely olive face before him, and bowed as politely as possible, though his brain was reeling. What was the meaning of this? Had he heard aright?

"I beg pardon," he said, addressing the young lady herself, for Mrs. Cushman had retreated. "I surely did not catch your name correctly! Did I understand it to be Lillie?"

Miss Cushman was a vivacious creature, and one whom most men would call charming. Her eyes were bright and sparkling, her voice rather musical, and her movements the personification of grace.



"That is my name," she affirmed. "A very common name, is it not? And so you are Mr. Burton. I have heard of you so often, that I have really been crazy to see you. I presume you received my note. Silly, wasn't it? But, father would have me write it! I beg you will pardon me if it wasn't just the proper thing to do."

Lodestone Lem was staring at her in almost open-mouthed bewilderment. The guests, the sounds of voices—all had faded away.

"There must be some mistake!" he declared. "There was another Miss Lillie Cushman!"

She glanced quickly about, before replying. The two were almost alone, now, the throng about her having melted away with Lodestone's coming. She drew him aside.

"You are not trying to play at cross-purposes with me," reprovingly. "I must say, I don't know what you mean!"

Lodestone was completely dumfounded.

"If you are Lillie Cushman, where is the Lillie Cushman I saw here the other day?"

A startled light leaped to her eyes. "This must be some of that delicious humor of which I have heard!" and she laughed strainedly. "I suppose I am like the English. You know it is said of them that they can never see the point of a joke. I must confess that I do not see the point to this, for it surely is a joke!"

"Tell me," and there was sternness in his voice, "what is the meaning of this? I called here some days ago and met a young lady, a Miss Lillie Cushman, the daughter of John Cushman. And now you are introduced to me as Miss Lillie Cushman, the daughter of John Cushman. Surely, he has not two daughters named Lillie!"

The laugh which greeted this speech was ringing enough to be the genuine article.

"Well, that is the hugest joke of the season!" she avowed. "Two Lillie Cushmans!"

"It would seem so!"

There was no humor in his voice, though her laughter had much contagion in it.

"That couldn't have been on the first of April, could it? If so, I should think you had been April-fooled. But it wasn't long enough ago. Only a few days ago, I believe you said?"

He bowed almost stiffly. He was becoming irritated as well as bewildered. Had he been invited to this ball solely to be puzzled and humiliated?

"How many daughters has John Cushman?" he asked.

"Only one. The one you see before you!" and she laughed again.

"Then whom did I see the other day?"

"It might have been one of the servants! I can't imagine who else!"

He was not satisfied with the answer. He felt that it was an explanation which did not explain.

"The woman I saw was not a servant!" he stoutly asserted. "She told me she was Lillie Cushman, the daughter of John Cushman, and I saw nothing in her manner to cause me to doubt it."

"Yet, when I tell you the same—"

"I have not said that I doubt your word!"

"True, you have not. I believe it is not polite to express such doubts!"

Lodestone Lem felt he must surely be going mad. He had come there with his heart aflame, filled with pleasurable anticipations of a meeting with the woman whom he had learned to love so dearly, only to be met with this. This what? Was there a mystery here? Did this woman speak truly, and had he been made the victim of a practical joke? He could not answer. He could only grope blindly, like a man in the dark. He knew not what to say; knew not what to think.

Some newer arrival was being piloted forward for the purpose of an introduction, and Lodestone Lem took the opportunity to slink away to an obscure corner, where he could puzzle over the problem uninterrupted.

His brain was in a whirl of uncertainty. He looked at the beautiful woman who was bowing low before the visitor to whom she had been presented. This was the new Lillie Cushman! He could not call her anything else. And where was the other, the one she had supplanted? Was there another?

He was like a drowning man catching at straws, not one of which was sufficient to support him.

He began by a careful review of all the facts known.

Miss Lillie Cushman—whether it was the first one or the second one he did not then stop to consider—was the daughter of John Cushman. She had not been at home for a long time, if indeed she had ever been at the Silver Hill residence until recently. She had only been there a few days, and perhaps had been seen by no one save the servants, before he met her. This last referred to the first Lillie. Where had the second Lillie been all this time? He was forced to confess she might have been in the house; and he could go no further. All beyond was conjecture.

He felt that his retirement from the throng of guests would seem inexplicable, and so forced himself to mingle with them and join in the festivities of the evening.

He disengaged himself at the first opportunity, and sought out Mrs. Cushman. He chided himself for not having done this sooner, before the new Miss Cushman had a chance to acquaint her with his strange questionings.

There were fewer women more gracious than Mrs. Cushman, when she chose to be gracious.

He was watching her narrowly as he approached her, and fancied he noted a heightened color in her cheeks. But, this might have been due solely to the excitements of the evening.

"I hope you are having an excellent time!" and she held out her hand to him without any reserve.

He hardly knew what reply he made, though he endeavored to appear nonchalant and easy.

Dancing was in progress in the big double room, and the sounds of the violins and the voice of the caller came to them plainly. He was pleased with this. It rendered them less likely to be overheard.

"You were so good as to speak to me of your daughter some days ago," he ventured.

He knew that his tones sounded strange and unnatural, though he was doing his best to control them.

She flushed a little, as she acknowledged the truthfulness of the statement.

"Would you be so kind, Mrs. Cushman, as to tell me which one of your daughters you referred to on that occasion?"

She gave him a look of swift surprise. If it was not genuine, it was excellently simulated.

"Which one of my daughters, did I hear you say?"

"Just so! Which one of your daughters? I came over the other day and chanced to form the acquaintance of one. To-night I was presented to another. And—it seems to me the most singular thing in the world—each is named Lillie!"

She looked as if she did not understand him.

"You came here the other day and met one of my daughters?"

"That's what I said, madam."

"But I have only one daughter! I introduced her to you to-night!"

Again was Lodestone Lem running his head against the same blank wall.

"And was that the one you—ah—mentioned to me in my office some days ago?"

"Most assuredly! I have no other."

Lodestone was losing his patience again.

"Then, whom did I meet in this house? I met a young woman here—a very handsome young woman—and she told me her name was Lillie Cushman, and that she was John Cushman's daughter."

She looked at him fixedly. To judge by her expressive face, she began to think he had been drinking.

"Who was she?" he demanded. "The young woman I met here some days ago?"

She regarded him with a charitable smile, seeming to think if he had not been drinking, he was surely going crazy.

"My dear Mr. Burton, it is impossible for me to answer your strange questions! If you saw any one here, as you say, it must have been one of the servants."

If he saw any one there!

The answer was maddening; and for a moment, looking into Mrs. Cushman's pitying face, Lodestone Lem began to wonder if he was not going crazy, sure enough.

"You have seen my daughter to-night," her words the essence of kindness, "and I hope you like her appearance. I am sure you will like her better when you know her better."

Lodestone scarcely heard her, so oppressed was he by the deep mystery that seemed to surround him.

She glanced about to make sure no one was within hearing.

"Of course you recall the proposition I made to you in your office, Mr. Burton?" the faintest trace of hesitancy in her words. "The proposition holds as good to-night as it did then. Therefore, you know why I hope you like my daughter's appearance."

Lodestone's thoughts were seething tumultuously. Not only was his mind clouded with this great mystery, but a sense of indefinable fear and dread had begun to steal over him. He loved to distraction the woman he had first met as Lillie Cushman. He was resolved to know what had become of her.

"Would it be possible for me to take a look at your servants?" he asked, recalling the statements made by the olive-tinted young woman who had been introduced to him that evening.

She started; and her glance plainly showed that she began to fear him as a madman.

"You say you think I may have met one of your servants the other day, and have mistaken her for Miss Lillie. I might settle that matter to my own satisfaction if I could see your servants."

She was shielded from replying by the approach of a party of ladies and gentlemen; and, to Lodestone's jealous eyes, it seemed she was glad to avail herself of the shelter thus offered.

He was in no humor for frothy conversation, and after a few words again made his way to the seclusion of his corner.

The guests remained late, and he found no

good opportunity of further questioning Mrs. Cushman. It was in a despairing mood, and with an agony that is indescribable, that he was finally forced to leave the house, with the deep mystery unsolved.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FRISCO FALLS IN LOVE.

"COME into the office, Ben! I want to see you for a few minutes!"

The tone was almost like that of an impatient command.

It was yet early morning, and Lodestone had been awaiting Frisco's coming for some time. He had ridden furiously from Cushman's, and had reached Chestnut Burr long before day, but had not attempted to close his eyes in slumber. Instead, he had nervously tramped up and down the narrow confines of his office, vainly endeavoring to solve the problem of the night.

Frisco came into the office reluctantly, not knowing but that he was to receive a reprimand for his acts of the day before. He knew he had been on a "booze" with the tramp compositor; and, having no clearly defined idea of what he had done or said while in that condition, feared the worst.

He felt much relieved when Lodestone took up another subject altogether.

"Are you acquainted with the servants at John Cushman's?"

"Never saw hide ner hoof o' one of them!"

Lodestone took a nervous turn about the room.

"I was in hopes you knew them. A most singular thing happened over there last night, and I have been thinking that maybe you could help me to get the clew to it."

Ben became almost embarrassed under his earnest gaze.

Lodestone did not notice it, and continued.

"I suppose you don't know anything about Cushman's daughters? Whether he has one or a dozen?"

"Don't know that he has any!" Ben declared.

"You're a pretty shrewd fellow, Ben, and have assisted me a good many times; and must do so again."

He took a seat in front of the cowboy, once more gazing earnestly at him.

Frisco fidgeted uneasily.

"Spit it out!" he commanded, striving to return the intense gaze. "There's somethin' botherin' o' yer head, an' I know it. What is it?"

Lodestone flushed a little in spite of his steadiness. But he was too much in earnest to beat a retreat. In a voice that was as calm as he could make it, he laid open to the cowboy the mystery which was puzzling him, going over it in all its details.

A knowing look came into Ben's eyes, as he listened. Lodestone Lem did not confess that he was in love with this girl, but the cowboy knew it quite as well as if such confession had been made.

"I'll do what I can to help you, Lodestone," he frankly averred. "Anything you want done, jist pint it out, an' I'm the man to do it. You know that without me a-sayin' so."

"I do know it, Frisco!" warmly and gratefully. "I've relied on you on too many occasions not to know it. That's why I called you in here."

"Now, it has occurred to me that you're the very man to untangle this puzzle. You're a good hand about a ranch, or about a house. You understand horses as well as cattle; and general work as well as either. I want you to go to John Cushman and hire to him in any position you can get."

"But the work hyer at Chestnut Burr!" Frisco protested.

"Somebody else can do it, or it can go undone. To me, this other thing is now of greater importance."

"I'm not going back on Chestnut Burr for any woman!" looking the doubting cowboy full in the eyes. "You mustn't think that, Ben. But no harm will come to the town by your going over there."

"What do you want me to do, if I git the job?" the cowboy questioned.

"Find out just how many daughters John Cushman has; and what has become of the Lillie Cushman I first saw. You can do that by carefully questioning the servants. Work yourself into their good graces, and I don't think you'll have any trouble on that score."

"It's a mighty lucky thing fer the workin' o' this trick that it ain't generally know'd how often we've parded it together!" Ben observed, with a self-accusing thought of what he had done yesterday. "Likely if 'twas, John Cushman 'ud kick me out as soon as I showed my face there."

Lodestone was so anxious to get at the mystery, that he insisted on Frisco hurrying to Cushman's without delay; and within a very short time thereafter the emissary was en route.

He went straight to the house, as instructed, and applied for a job; and, as Cushman needed a man-of-all-work at that time, Frisco easily obtained the coveted position. The place secured was the one he would have selected



for his purpose, had he been given the choosing. It gave him much time about the house and grounds, thus enabling him to the more quickly form the acquaintance of the servants.

"It 'pears to me I got this hyer job 'most too slick!" was the cowboy's suspicious comment, as he made his way to the kitchen, bent on meeting the cook. "We're a-tryin' to play roots on Cushman, an' mebbe he's a-tryin' the same thing on us. I'm to have good pay, plenty o' grub, an' not an over amount o' work to do. It's cur'us!"

It had occurred to him, suggested by the ease with which he had secured the place, that Cushman might have as much of an object in hiring him as he had in applying for the position. Perhaps Cushman hoped to worm from him valuable information concerning Lodestone Lem.

"If that's what he's up to, he'll find that this mouth can shet up as tight as a bear-trap!"

With this inward comment, he passed into the kitchen, and was soon in conversation with the cook.

Cushman's certainly seemed a bad place for susceptible men. The cook was a witching, black-eyed creature, with a merry face, dimpled chin and round, plump arms; and Frisco Ben was head over heels in love with her before he had been on the place an hour.

He was too wary a fox to immediately broach the object of his mission. Not until after night-fall did he venture a hint on the subject.

The cook had told him she did not object to tobacco smoke, and he had perched himself on a stiff chair near the stove. He could talk between puffs and admire her beauty through the veil of smoke that half-obscured him.

"A fly time they had hyer last night!" he declared. "I was a-talkin' to one of the cowboys, an' he was a-tellin' me all about it. Hookey! Don't I wisht I'd 'a' been hyer! It's been a good while since I flung these legs in a reg'lar, slap-up fandango."

"It was too slap-up fer you," was the cook's dry observation.

"Too rich fer my blood, eh? I reckon you never seen me when I had my store clothes on. All the belles of Frisco used to hang from the windows when I passed by."

"You mean they hung from the steeples?"

"Tain't them kind of bells I meant. I was a-talkin' about female belles. All dressed up in silks an' posies an' flub dubs!"

She gave a mocking laugh.

"What puzzles me," paying no heed to her mirth, "is that I didn't git a bid to this hyer swell affair. I reckon you were there?"

"I was!" she avowed.

"An' hob-nobbed with di'mond wearers, an' all sich?"

"I helped to take the luncheon in to them," demurely.

"Oh!"

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"Who was the handsomest lady in the ball-room last night?"

He was slowly and cautiously edging toward the subject of his thoughts.

"La! Ask me somethin' easy."

"I was 'most dead shore you'd say yourself!"

"I ain't quite a fool, Ben Hamilton!"

It was not often Frisco Ben was addressed by his surname, and it almost made him feel queer to hear it.

"I s'pose we oughtn't to go back on Cushman's girl, as we're eatin' his bread. If she wasn't handsome, she'd ought to be."

"She was real purty!" averred the cook, who had given her name as Sophie Slater.

That was as near as Ben got to his discovering anything that night.

He had, however, learned one thing of great importance, gaining this knowledge by observation and a few deft questions.

Not one of the servants answered to the description of the young woman first seen by Lodestone Lem. Not one of them could have acted the part which she played.

He returned to the charge the next night, having used his utmost endeavors during the interval to gain the cook's good-will. Perhaps the love he had conceived for her kindled a like flame in her own heart, and thus assisted him. Be that as it may, the cook was much more inclined to be confidential on this second night.

"Do I know Miss Lillie Cushman?" in reply to his direct inquiry. "I thought I did onc't, but I'm not so sure of it, now."

Ben blew aside the cloud of tobacco-smoke to get a better view of her face.

"Will you be so good as to explain what you mean by that?"

She gave her head a sly toss and looked at him knowingly.

"I might mean a good many things which I don't! I should think the words are plain enough."

"I reckon if you knowed her onc't you know her now!"

"But she ain't the same as she was!" bending toward him and lowering her voice.

Ben opened his eyes in mute questioning.

"I mean jist what I say, Ben Hamilton! There's somethin' wrong in this house. She ain't the same as she was."

"Got a new gown an' puttin' on airs, is she?" "Your skull's as thick as a door, Ben Hamilton!"

Ben ruefully rubbed his pate.

"She ain't the same woman!"

"How's that?" he demanded, speaking in a tone as low as hers.

"The Lillie Cushman that used to be here was light complected; the one that's here now is nighabout as dark as a Mexican."

"Two on 'em, air they?"

"That's the funny thing about it," growing more confidential as she proceeded. "Two of 'em, and both of 'em named Lillie. They say, now—the Cushmans do—that the first one was a cousin of the one that's here now, and that that's how her name comes to be Lillie, too. But, when she first came here—I'm speakin' of the light one—they didn't call her a cousin, then. No, they called her their daughter."

The cowboy was listening in open-mouthed astonishment.

"She wasn't here but a day or two, and I don't believe a single soul from the town seen her. I don't know if any of the cowboys seen her or not. But, I seen her; and I know what I'm a-talkin' about. She looked more like she might be their daughter than the one does that's here now."

"Cushman is dark!" Ben interpolated.

"So he is; but he don't look anything like this Mexican-skinned beauty that now calls him father."

"What's become of her—the fu'st one?"

"Ben Hamilton, I jist wish't you'd tell me! I don't know!"

Ben could only stare his wonder.

"She didn't go away in the daytime, that's sure!"

"No?"

"This new girl come here along late in the evening, and the next morning the other one was gone. How she went, I'll never say. But I—"

She stopped as if she feared to whisper her thoughts.

"You what?" grumblingly.

"Don't keep a feller a-setting hyer on cactus burrs, Miss Slater. It's cruelty to animals!"

"I don't know whether I ought to say it or not!" lowering her voice still more. "But I heard a noise in the night, and then a scream, and the sounds of footsteps. It was a woman's scream, too. I'm certain of that!"

"Did any one else hear it?" was Ben's eager query.

"I don't think they did." Not one of 'em have spoken to me about it, though I've give 'em plenty of hints and chances."

"Well, that beats my time!" staring at her as if dumfounded.

His pipe, which he had entirely forgotten, had gone out, and he was holding it now bowl downward, and unconsciously spilling the ashes on the floor.

"And that ain't all!" in another impressive whisper. "Of course, I was anxious to know what that scream meant; and so I slipped to the winder and looked out in the direction the footsteps seemed to be going. And what do you think I saw?"

The cook had so long held this terrible secret, that it was a positive relief to be able thus to unbosom it.

"You may knock me down with a feather, if I can guess!" Ben replied, in the same awed voice.

"I seen John Cushman walkin' straight down the path that leads to the front gate, and he was carryin' somethin' heavy in his arms; and I knowed it was somebody!"

Very likely the cook was mixing her after opinions with the thoughts of that night.

"Did it look like a woman?"

"It was something long, anyway, and it was all wrapped up, whatever it was."

Ben gave a great sigh.

"It must 'a' been her!"

"It couldn't have been anything else!" and the cook bobbed her head, sagely. "Ben Hamilton, there was murder committed in this house that night. I jist know it!"

She gave a quick glance over her shoulders as if expecting to see the ghost of the murdered woman at her elbow.

"You don't want to sling that idee around promiskus!" Ben cautioned. "It mightn't be healthy. If John Cushman murdered his daughter, or his daughter's cousin—But pshaw! Why should he?"

It was a question neither could solve; and though they returned to it again and again during the evening's talk, they left it, no wiser than at first.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE TRAMP COMPOSITOR'S PILGRIMAGE.

WHAT Lodestone Lem's thoughts were on receiving this information from Frisco Ben may be imagined, they can scarcely be analyzed. The communication only served to deepen the mystery. He could give no credence to the statement that the woman he first saw was no more than Cushman's niece. She had told him with her own lips that she was Cushman's daughter;

and he was sure she had not lied. But what had become of her? Had she really been murdered as the cook surmised, and her body borne away for concealment? If not, what was the load which John Cushman carried out to the front gate that night?

Granting that she had been murdered, and the inexplicable question arose: Why had so foul a crime been committed? She had said she was Cushman's daughter. Could even the basest of men slay his own child?

The mystery grew blacker and blacker.

He had instructed Frisco Ben to remain at Cushman's and to probe for further light on the dark subject.

As for himself, he could do nothing but wait, and turn to the tasks at hand.

This last he did with a feverishness that was all-consuming. Only by incessant work could he for a moment still the tumultuous thoughts that seemed at times about to suffocate him.

There was much to be done in his fight against the Land Pirates. The great contest acted as a stimulant, and he gave himself up to it, mind and body. He redoubled his energies. He had struggled and toiled before, but not after the manner of his present struggling and toiling.

The unfaithfulness of the tramp compositor had not yet been made apparent, and Lodestone still intrusted to him the mechanical work of getting out the paper.

Barnum Yates did not change for the better as the days went by. He was the same saw-toothed, crafty, furtive individual, ever watching Lodestone out of the corners of his cat-like eyes.

The *Spine*, small as it was and insignificant as its appearance would indicate, was a power in the great battle that was then raging. The paper at Silver Hill had sided with the Land Pirates, but its editor had not a tithe of the fertility and resource of Lodestone Lem.

And thus, amid a tumult of excitements, the day of the great election drew near.

The election was to be held on a Monday, and on the Saturday preceding it, Lodestone left the office, stating he would not return to Chestnut Burr until after the votes had been counted. The nature of his mission he confided only to his most intimate friends.

Barnum Yates watched him slyly as he went away. Lodestone had read the last "proof," had given all necessary instructions, and the paper was to be "made up" and "worked off" on the hand-press by the tramp. To him was also delegated the mailing.

The issue of the *Spine* was late that week, Friday being its regular day of publication. But there would be abundant time to get it in the Saturday evening mails, and have it spread over the district by election day. This Lodestone had counted on, having some things he wished to say at the last moment. They were pointed and stinging; and the lateness of the *Spine's* issue would prevent contradiction by the Silver Hill paper, and give them full effect.

As soon as Lodestone was out of sight, Barnum Yates drew a dirty piece of "copy" from one of his pockets, placed it on his case and began rapidly to put it in type.

"I guess I'll bear a hand at editin' this hyer paper," he muttered, as he ran his eyes over the writing and reached for one of the type-boxes.

There was a look of malignant pleasure on his sallow face.

That which he was setting up purported to be a letter from the Hon. Bunkum Landers, withdrawing from the race for the judgeship. It was calculated to do inestimable harm to Lodestone's cause. The very lateness of the issue of the paper, which Lodestone knew would prevent contradiction by the journal at Silver Hill, would also prevent the contradiction of this pretended withdrawal.

The letter, with Landers's name attached to the bottom of it, was comparatively short, and it did not take Yates long to put it in type. He displayed the heading, and gave the letter a position in the paper which could not fail to attract immediate attention to it.

"I think that'll do up the gent!" he mumbled, as he drove home the quins and got the form ready for the press. "If only some one don't come in, now, and bu'st up the scheme!"

He resolved, however, that should the office be visited by any of Lodestone's political friends, and the letter be prematurely detected, he would put on a bold face and lie the thing through. No one except Lodestone had a right to order anything out of the paper, and he was determined he would not take it out except at Lodestone's instructions. That Lodestone himself might return, he had little fear.

The boy who did the inking with the hand roller came in soon after; but he could not read type, and would have suspected nothing, if he had been able to.

Yates worked with a will, and when the papers were off, he and the boy prepared them for the mails. Yates carried them to the post-office himself, to make sure that no hitch should occur.

When they were safely deposited there, he returned to the newspaper office, breathing much freer. It seemed that nothing could now hinder



the success of the plan for the overthrow of Landers.

Once within the office, he rolled down his sleeves, and taking his coat from a peg, went out again, locking the office door behind him.

It was nearly sundown.

Yates glanced about to make sure he was unobserved, then struck into an alley and made his way out of the town. He kept a large building between him and the main street, until safely screened from view of any one in the town by a bit of rising ground.

He chuckled audibly as he glanced toward the adjacent hills.

"Done as slick as a whistle!" drawing his hat over his eyes and striding sturdily on. "I thought I was goin' to hev trouble this afternoon by the way the boss hung round. But the thing's done now, an' it can't be undone."

He slapped one thigh, gleefully, and even ventured to whistle a bar of a tune.

Darkness fell before he reached the hills, but he seemed familiar with the way and went on without hesitancy until he came to a little valley. There were some chaparral and scrub bushes here, and near them a dismounted horseman was standing.

It was evidently the man whom the tramp had come to seek; for Yates gave a whistle as soon as he saw him, and followed the whistle by advancing straight in his direction.

"Hello!" came the voice of the horseman. It was the voice of John Cushman.

"On time, ain't I?" and Yates uttered one of his disagreeable chuckles. "I've been workin' like a buzz-saw, an' only got the paper in the mail a little while ago. But it's all right. The scheme worked!"

Cushman seemed pleased with the information.

"I thought I could trust you!" was his avowal.

"Cracky! What's that?"

The tramp gave a start of fear and drew back.

"It's only the horses feeding!"

"But they's men over there!"

"Of course there are. But they'll not harm you. They're here for another purpose. Now that you've done your work, there'll be something for them to do."

He reached up to his saddle. It was a heavy, cowboy saddle, with side-pouches. From one of these he drew forth a bag of coin, shaking it so that its contents jingled musically.

"Here are the yellow boys for you, my fine fellow. I never go back on my word! I suppose you've got a copy of the *Spine* with you, to prove that you've filled your part of the contract?"

Yates had it and produced it; and Cushman, lighting a bull's-eye lantern, hurriedly read the printed letter.

"It's there, just as I wrote it. You'd better keep the copy. I had it written out in another hand, and you can exhibit it to shield yourself when Lodestone gets back. The thing will kick up a row, of course!"

He spread a handkerchief on the ground, and poured the money into it.

"Count it to see that it's all there!" flashing the lantern's light on the glittering heap.

Yates went down on his hands and knees, ran his yellow fingers through the yellow pile, and began counting the coins by stacking them one upon the other.

"It's all right!" gloatingly. "Two hundred and fifty dollars! You're a good paymaster, Cushman, an' I'll not fergit ye. Mebbe I kin help you ag'in some time."

"Likely you can! And now that you've got your money, you'd better make haste to put it where it won't be stolen. And one thing, Barnum; Don't make a fool of yourself and get on a howling drunk just because you've got a little money. It will create suspicion. If you show you can control yourself, there will be more of the yellow boys for you after awhile. But not if you act the idiot!"

He mounted his horse and turned it in the direction of his waiting men; and Yates, seeing that his presence was no longer needed or desired, clasped the bag of coin in his greedy fingers and hastened away.

## CHAPTER XI.

### LANDERS WEAKENS.

THE Hon. Bunkum Landers had not been making a vigorous campaign. He had "orated" at a number of points, but the fear of the Land Pirates was constantly upon him, and these efforts were uncommonly tame. But for the persuasiveness of Lodestone Lem he would have retired from the field long before. Lodestone kept him at the work by constant urging, and so the politician had gone on, buoyant and hopeful one day, and depressed and despondent the next. He was shrewd enough to see he was not making a strong fight, and was fearful of the result.

Therefore, he watched for the final issue of the *Spine* preceding the day of election with an interest that was feverish. Perhaps it would contain something—some shrewd and telling hit from the pen of the editor—that would yet save the day.

He had just returned home from his arduous labors, and had sent one of his boys to Chestnut Burr for his copy of the *Spine*. It was on the eventful Saturday night that witnessed the treachery of the tramp printer.

The boy rode a fast horse, and put the animal through, urged by the promise of a dime from the paternal hand. He was back by the time the family had finished supper; and the first thing the Hon. Bunkum did, after rising from the table, was to reach out his hand for the coveted paper.

"Gimme the dime, pop!" the boy demanded, well knowing the weakness of the parental memory.

Landers was about thrusting his nose into the paper, but he withdrew it, and gave the boy the dime, beaming at him kindly through his glasses. His kindness was due to his anticipation of the good things concerning himself which he expected to find.

He opened the sheet and gave a gasp of surprise. The first thing his eyes lighted on was the letter of withdrawal. He pulled the glasses down on his nose and looked again.

There it was in heavy black print:

"Withdrawal of Honorable Bunkum Landers!"

He gave such a snort of astonishment that his good wife ran toward him, thinking he was about to fall in a fit.

"Mary, there isn't anything the matter with me, is there?" glancing bewilderedly at her, and at the same time pointing a trembling finger at the glaring headlines. "Does that say I've withdrawn?"

She excitedly confirmed his fears.

The politician looked about him in dismay. Then, without another word, slowly read the letter.

"I don't understand it!" he declared, getting up all atremble. "There something wrong here! I never wrote that letter!"

He threw down the paper and seized his hat.

"Where are you going?" questioned Mrs. Landers?

"To town. I must find out what that means. I must see Lodestone. There's a mistake or a fraud somewhere. If Lodestone wrote that—but I know he didn't! He wouldn't do it without consulting me. The thing's got to be corrected. It ruins my chances. I'm 'most afraid it's too late to do anything, though!"

His face was red and white by turns, and, after making this last declaration, he sat down again, with his hat in one hand, and perplexedly scratched his head.

"I don't know what to do! I reckon, though, I'd better ride over to Chestnut Burr and confer with Lodestone and the boys. I don't understand this thing a bit."

He shouted to the urchin who was putting away the horse, to bring the animal out again, and then impatiently went out into the yard to hurry the few preparations.

While thus engaged he heard the trampling of many hoofs, and a few moments later a body of horsemen came into view. His first look at them showed they were masked.

This, coming on the heels of the pretended letter of withdrawal, took all the fire out of him. He turned as white as a sheet, and grasped a hitching-post for support.

The horsemen came on with ominous steadiness, making straight toward him. He felt in his very bones they were coming for him. If there had been any chance to run, he would have taken it. But even though it was night, they were so near he knew they could see him plainly, and he feared if he attempted flight, they might make a target of him.

"I guess I don't want to go over to Chestnut Burr!" and he shivered as he addressed the boy. "Take the horse back into the stable. I'll see what these gentlemen are after."

The boy obeyed wonderingly, stealing half-frightened glances at the masked riders.

"It's you, is it?" and the leader of the mounted men spoke to Landers, bringing his horse up with a heavy hand.

Landers shivered again.

It was the same voice he had heard in Lodestone's office.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" and he bowed politely, though still forced to cling to the post for support. "A pleasant evening."

"You're Bunkum Landers, ain't you?" the disguised voice asked.

"The same, at your service!" and Landers bowed even lower than before.

"I hear you are out of the race for the judgeship?"

Landers clung to the post without replying. He did not know what to say.

"It was in the *Spine* this evening, and is all over the country before now. I congratulate you, Mr. Landers, on your good sense. Politics isn't a healthy trade in Nevada, and you've done well to get out of it."

Landers recalled the many threats that had been made against him by the Land Pirates and their agents; and, beholding these threatening horsemen, confessed mentally that it probably was a good thing.

"It would have been a good deal better if you had got out when you were first warned to do

so," the man continued. "It would have saved you some work, and more worry. And now that you're out, you'll be extremely wise to stay out."

Landers admitted that the speaker might be correct.

"You were getting a horse ready when we came up! Were you going to town?"

"I—I had some thoughts of it."

"Better not go!" viciously jerking out the words. "It'll be healthier for you if you stay at home. You may not know who we are, but you know we're opposed to Lodestone's gang. I have placed a number of men in Chestnut Burr with instructions to shoot you on sight if you appear in the town before the close of the election."

Landers bowed once more, not knowing what else to do.

"I hope you understand that. We mean just what we say. If you come to town before the election is over, you will surely run against a bullet. I suppose you know you wrote that letter of withdrawal?"

"Gentlemen, upon my word of honor, I—"

He bit the sentence short off, as the muzzle of a cocked revolver was suddenly thrust toward him.

"Come! Come! No lying now! You know you wrote that letter! Who else but you would dare to write it?"

The politician was still with fear.

"Say that you wrote it!"

"Gentlemen, I—"

"Say that you wrote it!" in thunderous tones.

"I wrote it!" Landers moaned.

"That's better! Always stick to the crystal of truth, and you'll die happy. I'd like to hear you say that again."

Landers said it again, in a voice that was even more weak and shaky.

"If you'll practice that, you can say it like a man, after a while. But you do first rate for an undrilled pupil. Now, I want a word or two with you in the house."

He swung out of his saddle; and when Landers tottered by his side toward the door, the other horsemen circled the house, as if to block any escape.

Mrs. Landers, who had heard a portion of the conversation, was quite as white and faint as was her husband; though, when the masked man commanded her, she bustled about in a very lively way.

Landers was forced to sit down at a table, and after pen, ink and paper had been produced, he wrote a letter, at the masked man's dictation.

"Write it just as I tell you," the disguised man commanded, giving the table a heavy thump with his fist.

And this is what he dictated, and what Landers wrote:

"MY DEAR LODESTONE:—"

"Before you receive this, you will have read my letter of withdrawal in the *Spine*. I was, and am, sorry to have to go back on you in that way. But I see nothing else to do. I have been living here under a false name—"

Landers gave a great start, as these words fell from the man's lips.

"Go on!" he thundered, giving the table another thump. "It's so, every word of it; and you know it! Everybody in this country isn't blind. I've had men on your track for some time, and have raked up the whole history of your past life. Now, don't interrupt me again. I shall dictate nothing but the truth, and what you'll know to be the truth. Now, go on again!"

Landers would never be whiter as a corpse, but he poised the pen and obediently wrote, though in a shaky hand, as the man continued:

"—and my deception has been discovered. Certain things done by me years ago induced me to adopt this course. Those things are now known, and will be used against me if I do not leave the country. I intend to get out of here at once. That is the reason I sent the letter of withdrawal to the *Spine*, with instructions to your printer to put it in without fail, whether you were there when it came or not. I hope you will not be too severe on me for what I have done. Good by. BUNKUM LANDERS."

When the letter had been put in an envelope, duly addressed in Landers's own handwriting, the masked man took it and thrust it in his pocket.

"I will see that this is mailed. And now, if you're as wise a man as I think you are, you will not be found here after next Monday. Good-evening!"

It was an abrupt leave-taking; but the shivering Landers was not sorry to see him go.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A DEFEAT AND A TRIUMPH.

THE masked horsemen had not completed their work. As Lodestone Lem was on his way homeward on the morning of the fateful election day, urging forward his tired horse and intensely anxious to reach Chestnut Burr, he was confronted by the masked figures that had so greatly frightened Landers.

He halted, when he saw them barring the trail and caught the stern command of the chief.



His smile was bitter as they closed about him, but he lost none of his easy nonchalance.

"We don't intend to hurt you," was the reassuring statement, "but as a little delay may be of great importance to our friend, John Cushman, we mean to hold you here a while. He's rolling up the votes at Chestnut Burr, and he don't want to be checked in the good work."

Lodestone Lem knew that the speaker was himself John Cushman, but he gave no sign of this knowledge.

"I don't know that it will make much difference, though, since your main candidate is off the track."

Lodestone's looks showed that he did not comprehend.

"Why, I thought if any one would know of it, you would. It was in the *Spine*!"

Lodestone was almost startled out of his calm.

"What was in the *Spine*?"

"Landers's letter of withdrawal."

Noting the look of amazement that still lingered on Lodestone's face, the speaker produced a copy of the *Spine*, and pointed to the printed letter as he handed Lodestone the paper.

The latter's surprise was certainly very great, though his face gave scant indication of it. A glance gave him the purport of the letter. He did not believe Landers had written it; but that it had been written by Cushman or one of his agents, who had bribed the tramp to insert it.

"A cute trick!" he said, his mind already busy with the problem thus presented, as he passed the paper back. "That was very well done. I shall really have to congratulate Cushman on his neatness, the next time I meet him."

The men were dismounting and tethering their horses to the low-growing bushes. One of them advanced and led away the horse of the chief.

Lodestone looked after them in an interested way, seeming not at all disturbed by this unexpected discovery.

"The fools think they have me," was his inward comment. "They will see. No doubt they've scared off Landers; but I'll play them a trick worth two of theirs. I've been fearing something of the kind, all the time."

From which it was evident he was anticipating Landers's defeat or failure, and was not wholly unprepared for such a contingency.

It was considerably past noon when he was released by these men and permitted to go on his way.

When he reached Chestnut Burr, the polls were closed, and the votes were being counted. Landers's withdrawal had already become ancient history to the citizens of the lively town. Lodestone's friends had, however, chosen another man to take Landers's place; and this man had been voted for by the Lodestone faction, which represented almost the entire population.

Lodestone smiled grimly as the news of the hurrying events which had transpired during his absence was rehearsed to him. He expressed no surprise at Landers's weakening. He knew, as well as did his friends, that the announcement of the new candidate's name must have remained almost wholly unknown in the region beyond Chestnut Burr; and that the new candidate could not, therefore, hope to poll enough votes to give him the ghost of a chance.

Lodestone was anxious to interview Yates on the subject of the letter of withdrawal, and so took his way toward the newspaper office. He passed the post-office en route and got his mail. Among the letters was the one from Landers.

"A slick scheme!" he muttered, leaping at once to a correct solution of the matter. "They have got 'onto' the old man's record—which likely enough is a black one—and have forced him to skip the country."

The surmise, however, did not entirely shield Barnum Yates. Lodestone did not guess at all the facts, and so took it for granted that the letter of withdrawal had been written by the politician. But he hauled Yates over the coals in a most lively manner, for all that, giving him to understand that he was not the editor of that paper, and therefore had no right to insert anything into its pages, no matter by whom presented or signed.

Yates bore the reprimand sullenly, though glad enough to get off with nothing more.

A little inquiry showed Lodestone that Landers had not been in the town during the day, and further investigation revealed the fact that the politician had sold his claim on the day preceding, and had left the country, taking with him his family and all his belongings.

And here it may not be amiss to say that Landers recognized John Cushman's voice, and that the recognition had hastened his leave-taking. With such dangerous knowledge in Cushman's possession, the man of Silver Hill was not a person to be trifled with. Lodestone had assured Landers before, that Cushman was the leader of the maskers. Now, he knew it; and was anxious to place as many leagues as possible behind him in the shortest time.

A great surprise awaited the people of the district when the returns came in from the election. The voters of Chestnut Burr already knew

of it, as did also Lodestone's friends throughout all the region. But only the "workers" and those who were known to be trusty had been admitted to the secret.

The surprise came in the nature of an announcement that Lodestone Lem was elected to the Nevada Legislature by a small plurality.

There had already, of course, been two candidates. At every polling precinct that could be reached by Lodestone and his friends, the name of the Chestnut Burr candidate had been removed and the name of Lodestone Lem substituted; and so quietly had it all been done that the Cushman crowd knew nothing of it until the returns began to come in.

To work this scheme was what induced Lodestone to leave Chestnut Burr on that Saturday afternoon before the paper had gone to press. He had feared—in fact was almost convinced—that Landers, the candidate for the judgeship, was doomed to defeat.

Landers's defeat meant the elevation of one of Cushman's friends to a position on the bench of the court that was to hear the great Alcatraz land case. With two judges known to be against his cause, Lodestone Lem could not hope to succeed. The court would certainly decide against him. Therefore, he saw that something must be done to prevent such a decision.

In this dilemma, his fertile mind conceived the idea of a personal and quiet race for the Legislature. It had truly been in the nature of a "still hunt;" and now it was known to be successful.

The Legislature would convene before the time set for the hearing of the land case. The Cushman nominee for the judgeship was universally known to be corrupt and incompetent, a drunkard and a moral wreck. As a member of the legislature, Lodestone could prefer impeachment charges against him; and, if he could rally sufficient votes to his aid, could force an investigation that would result in the removal of the new judge.

This was the course he had now marked out; and by and through it he meant to win.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A TANGLED WEB.

THE great contest was ended, and Lodestone had a few minutes in which he felt he could sit down and think.

Not for an hour, since the eventful night of the ball, had Lillie Cushman been out of his thoughts. Neither the first Lillie Cushman, nor the second. He had been in constant communication with Frisco Ben, being kept informed by Frisco's letters of all the cowboy could discover.

This was not much. Frisco had seen, and even conversed with the new Lillie Cushman; but he had not seen, nor had he heard, of the one in whose fate Lodestone was so deeply interested.

Lodestone Lem, in his frequent visits to Silver Hill—for he had gone there many times during this heated campaign—had made careful inquiries concerning the daughter of John Cushman. The people of Silver Hill were wholly ignorant on the subject; and as they knew nothing of what Lodestone believed to be the strange substitution of one girl for another, they had little interest in the matter.

John Cushman had come there a year before, bought the grounds, and erected a house. Where he had come from, or what his past life had been, no one seemed to know. He appeared to have plenty of money, and became interested in cattle rearing and in some of Silver Hill's mining enterprises. All this gratified the people of Silver Hill, and they thought to ask no questions. It was none of their business to question where John Cushman had come from, or how he had obtained his money. That he had it, and was spending his wealth for the benefit of Silver Hill, was enough.

His daughter—the Silver Hillites knew not that there was supposed to be more than one—had but recently made her appearance. It was said she had been off somewhere attending a boarding-school. At all events, that was the report given out by the Cushmans. Where this boarding-school was located, no one had been informed. And the daughter—the one the people of Silver Hill had seen—was the olive-tinted beauty known to the reader as Lillie Cushman number two.

Not satisfied with the result of these investigations, Lodestone Lem had boldly re-entered the Cushman home.

The first visit yielded no tangible fruit. He held a conversation with Mrs. Cushman and her alleged daughter, and even got a talk with Frisco Ben, but he learned nothing more than he already knew.

He did discover, however, that Ben was deeply in love with the charming Miss Slater, and this discovery inclined him to the fear that the ex-cowboy was paying more attention to his own love affair than to that of the man who had sent him there.

Lodestone was invited to return, and he improved his opportunity by making three other visits.

He was not long in awakening to the fact that the dark-skinned young woman had marked him for her own. She was kind; she was charming; she was everything that a bright young woman can be, who has set her mind on capturing the man she fancies.

Mrs. Cushman's attentions were also very marked.

More than once she had whispered to him, when opportunity presented:

"My dear Lodestone, I hope you will like Lillie! She is a splendid catch, if I do say myself. If you two could come to some agreement, and thus bring about a settlement of this terrible land business, it would be a great relief to me."

It was not the way in which mothers usually put their daughters forward. There have been maneuvering mammas since time began, but it is customary for them to maneuver after a different fashion. Lodestone knew that.

Time and again he had taxed Mrs. Cushman with double-dealing; time and again he had questioned the younger woman about the fair-haired beauty he had first seen in the house. Practically, it was a waste of words. They claimed, though, to know, now, who the young woman was.

"I think it's the funniest thing of the season," Miss Cushman averred, the first time he referred to the matter. "You know I couldn't dream of what you were talking, the night of the ball! It was my Cousin Lillie you saw in the parlor that day. She went away the same evening that I came."

Lodestone Lem felt that she was falsifying, but he kept this feeling to himself.

"Where is her home?" he asked, as quietly as he could.

"In New York."

"State or City?" his pulses throbbing.

"The city."

But when Lodestone requested the street and number, her memory suddenly failed her.

This only served to further convince him of her duplicity, if any additional evidence was necessary.

He knew in his inmost heart that the woman before him was not Lillie Cushman, the daughter of John Cushman. Had not the fair-haired beauty with whom he had conversed in the parlor on his first visit to the house, told him that she was John Cushman's daughter? and had not the entire ingenuousness of her words and manner carried with it the weight of conviction? It was a subject on which he would not permit himself to doubt.

A subsequent questioning of Frisco Ben had brought out the fact that Mrs. Cushman had had a talk with Sophie Slater, and the other servants who were likely to know something of the matter; and in a manner that was very deft and artful, had tried to make them think the first Miss Cushman was what she now represented her to be: only a niece of John Cushman, and not his daughter.

The other servants had swallowed the lie readily enough; but not so with Miss Slater. Her suspicions had been too deeply stirred. She was convinced that murder had been committed, and nothing could shake her from the belief. Yet she was wise enough to see that her slender evidence would have little weight in an accusation against John Cushman; and so she held her peace, only confiding her thoughts to the sympathetic cowboy.

Lodestone was somewhat disturbed by the very evident fancy which the new Miss Cushman had conceived for him. He could see plainly that she was a girl of an intense and passionate disposition; and that because of this, she was, in many respects, a creature to be feared.

He generally became self-accusing when thinking of her. He had used his power of blandishment for the purpose of discovering something concerning the first Miss Cushman, and had evoked the slumberous passion of the dark-skinned beauty.

Of the passion thus evoked, he was afraid. He saw she was a woman who might do desperate things, if occasion demanded. He felt that she could be a languorous angel or a fiend incarnate according to circumstances. One thing was certain, she was not a woman to be trifled with.

Yet he could not remain away from Cushman's, or put a stop to his search.

He scarcely knew what he was searching for. In his soberer moments he told himself that the idea of murder was an absurdity; that John Cushman, bad as he was, would not have slain his own daughter.

It seemed more probable that he had spirited her away to make place for the woman who had assumed the present role, and that he had done so because he could not bend her to his wishes. His desire, as has been seen, was to marry her to Lodestone, and thus stop the disastrous land fight. In all likelihood, she had refused to be made a tool. Hence, another had been brought forward to take her place.

Lodestone could adopt no other line of reasoning that satisfied him so well as this, and yet it did not satisfy him in all points.

As for the claim which had been set up, that the first Lillie was a cousin who bore that name, he knew it was false. Her own words convinced him to the contrary; and to this proof the state-



ments made by Mrs. Cushman and the second Lillie, on the night of the ball, could be added in confirmation. It was plain to him that the claim of cousinship was an afterthought, made for the purpose of allaying his apprehensions and suspicions.

To this point his researches and ponderings had led him; and he could not go beyond it without further light. That light was tediously slow in coming. It had required a month's time to scrape together the meager facts of which he felt sure. At that rate of progress, he might never be able to get to the bottom of the mystery.

His head had sunk on his breast, and he had become oblivious to his surroundings, as he dwelt on all this.

Suddenly he was aroused by the blare of cornets and the taps of drums. A series of wild cheers rent the air. And looking through the window into the semi-gloom of the street, he beheld a concourse of men and boys marching toward the office.

They were coming to honor him on his elevation to the Legislature; and, when they had gathered around the office door, he put his reflections of Lillie Cushman behind him, and went out on the steps.

His eyes kindled as he glanced over the throng. These were his friends. They had stood by him through a hard-fought contest. They had been true. All he had, and was, he owed to them. They were endeared to his heart.

Therefore, he welcomed them kindly; and, elevating his voice, delivered a short address that drew forth tumultuous applause.

From love to politics; from politics to love! Thus he pivoted. Yet, throughout it all, Lillie Cushman retained her place in the center of his inner consciousness.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE BODY FOUND IN THE CANYON.

FRISCO BEN uttered a little cry that was a commingling of fear and wonder.

There was not a great deal of work to be done at Cushman's, and he had been using his evenings in prospecting for ore among some of the adjacent hills.

Nearly a month had elapsed since the events narrated in the chapters immediately preceding; and still no light had been thrown on the Cushman mystery.

Before uttering the startled cry, the cowboy had been making his way down a precipitous slope toward a gloomy and forbidding canyon. When near the bottom his feet had slipped, and he had plunged wildly downward, bringing up in a lot of bushes and debris.

The fall had not occasioned the cry; it was the gruesome sight he beheld, as he scrambled to his feet. He had almost tumbled on the corpse of a woman! The body was in a state of advanced decay—the dry withering decay common in that climate.

It was still clothed in dress-stuff of some dark material, and a glory of light-brown hair fell backward from the rocky bed that upheld the form. The hair was tangled in the bushes and made foul by the sediment that had become mixed through it.

As for the face, it was blackened and shriveled beyond recognition.

Yet Frisco Ben was morally sure he saw before him the remains of the fair-haired Lillie Cushman—the woman of Lodestone's love!

The cowboy shivered as he looked into the blackened face. Few men had stronger nerves than Frisco Ben, but the strongest of human nerves were never calculated to view impassively a scene like that.

He stooped over and made a hasty examination of the remains.

He saw the evidence of a blood clot in the thick hair near the head. He saw also a ragged hole in the skull—a hole that had been made by a bullet, or by some heavy weapon.

Frisco was inclined to think the hole the result of a bullet-wound, for a bit of the skull seemed to have been torn away.

All the dark suspicions that had been generated by his many talks with Sophie Slater thronged on him now as convincing proofs.

Yet sure as he was that murder had been committed and that Lillie Cushman was the victim of it, he could not do else than endeavor to stop the whirl of his dark thoughts, and seriously ask himself the question:

"Would John Cushman be guilty of a deed like that? Could he slay his own child?"

Other questions came, also:

"If he had murdered her, why had he done so? If he had a purpose to accomplish concerning Lodestone, could not that purpose have been effected without a resort to so foul a crime?"

There was but one answer:

"It could have been effected. The same result might have been obtained by other processes less criminal, not to say less unfatherly."

And yet, here was the evidence, testifying mutely and sorrowfully to the commission of a crime which Frisco's reasoning told him had been unnecessarily perpetrated.

Frisco had never been acquainted with Lillie Cushman in life; and even if he had been, he could not have identified the beautiful and accomplished woman in this blackened remnant of humanity.

He made another examination for the purpose of fixing in his mind all possible points of identity, then climbed slowly and thoughtfully out of the canyon.

He deemed it best to leave the remains undisturbed, as when he found them, and acquaint the Cushmans with his discovery, before doing anything else.

He also meant to send a letter to Lodestone Lem by the first mail.

To inform the Cushmans of what he had found seemed the most natural thing to do, under all the circumstances. He could, of course, go straight to the officers in Silver Hill; but to have done that, would have laid him open to distrust on the part of the Cushmans.

He relied strongly on the native good sense of the cowboys and servants. The servants had seen Lillie Cushman, and the cowboys would not allow anything to be done that suggested the covering up of a crime. And besides, if he went to the officers of Silver Hill, what could he allege? He could not substantiate one of his surmises.

How he had longed for the presence and clear head of Lodestone Lem! But Lodestone was not even at Chestnut Burr, then, as Frisco knew. He was in one of the towns further down the valley. The cowboy could reach him with a letter as quickly as he could go himself; and no doubt that letter would hurry Lodestone to this point of interest.

Many times he halted, after gaining the ridge, and looked with an uncertain expression toward the gloomy canyon. Impelled by the course he had marked out, he had occasional misgivings of its wisdom.

With the canyon and its dreadful contents behind him, he turned resolutely toward Cushman's, and strode on at his best gait.

It lacked little over an hour of sundown, and he felt that the body ought not to remain in the canyon another night. It might be torn by wolves or other animals, and thus every chance of identification be lost. That it had not already been so torn, puzzled him.

He was disappointed, on reaching the house, at finding Mr. and Mrs. Cushman absent. They had departed that afternoon in their carriage, and no one knew when they would return.

He whispered mysteriously of his discovery to Sophie Slater, and requested her to notify such of the cowboys as were near, and to bring these cowboys and the servants around to the front door, while he went in search of the new Miss Lillie Cushman.

He found her idly glancing over a book in the sitting-room.

For a moment he gazed at her through the open doorway, much as one might gaze at a beautiful serpent. The belief he had harbored seemed impossible, when thus looking at her.

Her dark eyes were lustrous and expressive, her red lips were like rosebuds, her olive skin soft as finest satin. To her head there was a regal poise. If a murderess, she was indeed a beautiful one; such a one as a fiend of the lower regions might wish to choose for a bride.

His heavy footfall, as he advanced, startled her, but when she saw who it was, a pleasant smile came to her lips.

This changed to a startled glance, as she noted the soberness of his mien.

"I'd like to see you a minute out by the front door," he said, very firmly, though very courteously. "I've made a strange sort of find, while lookin' fer silver in the hills over there. I've sent for the cowboys an' the servants to hear what I've got to say. Cushmans ain't hyer. Therefore, I thought it 'ud be proper fer you to hear it, too, in their place!"

She arose carelessly and followed him from the room. There was possibly a slight brightening of the color in her cheeks, and a brightening of the eyes; but that was all. She seemed not in the least agitated, and, to judge by appearances, could have had no idea of what was in the cowboy's mind.

Sophie Slater had executed her mission hurriedly, but thoroughly, and the servants, with such of the cowboys as could readily be got at, were already grouped about the front door.

Their suppressed manner, as Frisco and the young woman came forward, showed that Miss Slater's tongue had been busy with the cowboy's suggestions.

Miss Cushman glanced curiously over the throng, almost scornfully, as she stood on one of the wide steps and surveyed them.

"You arouse my curiosity," and she laughed as she turned on Frisco. "What have you found in the hills? A gold mine? Proceed; I'm anxious to hear about it."

Frisco's face was as grave as that of an undertaker, as he replied to her, and began to tell of his strange discovery.

A thrill of excitement ran through the crowd, as they listened to his narration of how he tumbled down the slope almost upon the body.

He went somewhat into details, speaking hurriedly and almost breathlessly; but not a hint

did he give of whose he thought the body to be. He meant to leave that to a later time.

Throughout it all he endeavored to closely watch the young woman whom he so strongly suspected of complicity in the crime.

She had flushed slightly as she began to understand the character of the communication he was to make; and this flush was succeeded by a pallor that made her dark skin seem almost sallow. But there was no evidence of guilt in her manner. Only an intense and natural excitement, combined with great curiosity.

Frisco Ben had barely concluded, when the cowboys announced their immediate intention of going after the body.

She made no objection to this, but said, on the contrary, that it was the proper thing to do, and then commented freely on the strangeness of the case.

Frisco accompanied the cowboys, in order to direct them, and, looking back at the house when far away, saw her still standing on the steps. He could not see her face, of course, but he fancied it must be sallower than before, and drawn with anxiety.

The body was found just where, and in the condition, he had left it.

He hoped that some of the cowboys might recognize in that wasting form the remains of the first Lillie Cushman, but in this he was doomed to disappointment, and he remembered that it was not certain that any of the cowboys ever beheld her.

A sort of stretcher was improvised from boughs and brush. On this a blanket was laid. The body was lifted tenderly; and when placed on the stretcher, was covered by another blanket. Then they climbed quietly out of the canyon with their ghastly burden; and in a mournful procession made their way toward the house.

By the time they regained it, it was almost sunset; and when the body was exposed to view in the front yard, the sun's last red, lingering rays played grimly over it.

Miss Cushman had come out with the servants to take a look at the dreadful object.

"This is terrible!" she moaned, wringing her hands distressedly. "Terrible! Terrible!"

Frisco Ben was again narrowly watching her.

He was puzzled. She was pale and agitated, but for the life of him he could not tell whether she had any guilty knowledge or not of the murder that had so evidently been committed.

"Send for the officers!" she demanded, still wringing her hands. "You say the poor thing was murdered! If so, it ought to be ferreted out by the officers."

She seemed very much in earnest on this point, which served to still further bewilder Frisco. It was not likely, he thought, that she would want the officers to look into the case, if she was really guilty.

A mounted cowboy was sent in hot haste for the Marshal of Silver Hill; and in suppressed anxiety all awaited the officer's coming.

In the mean time, the remains were borne into the house and deposited on a cot prepared for them.

When the marshal arrived, he brought with him the coroner; and a jury of the cowboys was thereupon impaneled to view the body judicially and take such testimony as promised to throw light on the case.

Darkness had fallen before the coming of these officials, but that did not interfere with the investigation they desired to make.

Of course, nothing was learned beyond what is known to the reader. In fact, not so much; for Frisco did not discourse of his suspicions; and Miss Slater was not called on to testify concerning what she knew. She did not wish to be questioned, yet, and kept in the background. All the jury learned was of the finding of the body and its present condition, things with which they were already familiar. Nothing to throw any light on the mystery; nothing to suggest who the murderer or murderers might be.

Through it all Miss Cushman bore herself with becoming modesty and discretion. She was only asked a few questions, and these she answered readily. To judge by her acts and words, she had no desire in the world but that the truth might be revealed.

Her bearing and manner puzzled Frisco Ben more and more.

The body was not a pleasant thing to retain in the house; and when the jury finished its work, an escort of cowboys took up the ghastly burden, bore it near to a bit of chaparral beyond the garden wall, and gave it respectful interment.

Only in this did Frisco Ben see anything of a questionable character. The hurried burial was brought about through the influence of Miss Cushman; by her representations that she feared she could not sleep with the body still remaining in the house, because of the condition of her overwrought nerves. It seemed to Frisco a haste that was altogether indecent and unnecessary. He had desired the interment postponed until the return of the Cushmans.

The marshal, however, and the coroner, sided with Miss Cushman against him; prompted to do so, as he verily believed, by the charm of her beauty.



The report of the coroner's jury was to the effect that nothing was known of the woman or her antecedents, and that the cause and manner of her death were undiscoverable. This was all, save a suggestion that she might have fallen into the canyon and have been killed by striking against a boulder.

And here the matter was likely to end for all time, if not taken up by other hands.

That same night, Frisco Ben visited Silver Hill and mailed to Lodestone Lem a full account of what had transpired.

## CHAPTER XV.

### WHAT MISS SLATER SAW BEYOND THE GARDEN.

SOPHIE SLATER'S mistrust was deeper, even, than that of Frisco Ben, probably for the reason that she had already made up her mind as to the character of what had occurred.

What she had seen, as well as the scream she had heard, on the night of the disappearance of the first Miss Cushman, had implanted firm and positive theories in her breast. Nothing but decided proofs to the contrary could have shaken her opinions.

Because of this she watched the wily brunette with a jealous persistence that nothing could escape.

The hurried burial, and the part taken by Miss Cushman in securing it, did not fail to impress her. To her mind, it showed that Miss Cushman had something to fear. That, in short, she recognized the body, knew how the woman's death had been brought about, and was fearful that others might come to the same knowledge.

Notwithstanding that Sophie Slater had known the first Miss Cushman, she could not have testified positively that the body brought in by the cowboys was that of the missing young lady. Miss Slater believed it to be, but she could not have sworn to it. The clothing found on the remains was not of a kind she had ever seen the fair-haired girl wear; and the features were entirely unrecognizable.

But this did not cause her to doubt the truth of her convictions. The clothing could have been changed, without much trouble; and a shrewd criminal would probably have taken that very course to baffle suspicion, in the fear of the body's possible discovery.

Miss Slater considered all these things, and her distrust of the new Miss Cushman deepened.

The night that witnessed the burial was fairly dark, though a faint moon struggled at times from behind clouds and partially revealed the landscape.

Sophie Slater was too restless and nervous to retire for sleep, though the time for retiring had long since arrived. Instead, she sat in the kitchen, with only the light of the fire, and thought of the things that had that day occurred.

Frisco Ben had departed for Silver Hill for the purpose of mailing his account to Lodestone Lem. No one, however, knew of his departure, except the suspicious Miss Slater.

The love affair between her and Frisco Ben had attained sufficient proportions to warrant the closest intimacy on all subjects of mutual interest; and thus it was that Miss Slater not only understood the object of Ben's mission to Silver Hill that night, but knew also why he had come to Cushman's.

Fortunately for Lodestone's plans, the cook proved a safe repository for this secret. It may be that the very mystery which surrounded her kept her lips sealed, and made of her a valuable ally.

While sitting thus, in the gloom of the kitchen, she heard light footsteps pass the kitchen window.

There was enough in this to arouse her to immediate interest, though under other circumstances she might have paid no attention to a thing so trivial.

She got up quietly and stole to the window by which the footsteps had passed. Along the darkened garden walk she beheld two figures hurrying. One was that of a man, and she felt sure the other was that of a woman.

She could barely suppress a little cry of frightened surprise. By a sort of intuition she knew that the figure of the woman was none other than that of Miss Cushman. Who was the man, she could not even conjecture.

The man was bearing something that occasionally glittered dully in the faint moonlight. Whether it was a weapon or an implement, a pistol or a spade, she could not tell.

With every fiber thrilling, she turned hastily back from the window, threw a heavy dark shawl over her head, and tip-toed out into the night. She felt that these were mysterious proceedings, and was resolved to learn what they meant.

By the time she had passed around the kitchen, the figures were at the further end of the long garden walk, and almost invisible in the gloom.

A feeling of oppression and fear swept over her, causing her to cower indecisively. If this the man and woman were villainously-inclined persons she believed, they would not hesitate to kill her, should they detect her presence. It would be but another unfathomable disappearance.

Had not Miss Slater been a woman of courageous mold, she would have retreated and crept shivering back to the kitchen. As it was, her longing to witness what these two meant to do drove her on. Her fears were not entirely overcome, but they were held in abeyance by the strong impulse that moved her.

She did not see them as they passed from the garden, but she heard the low creaking of the gate as it was swung on its hinges.

The soil had recently been irrigated, and more than once she stumbled blindly from the path and went shoe-mouth deep in the soft mud.

"I'll have to come out early in the morning and rub out them tracks," she grumbled. "If I wasn't tryin' to see two things at once, I wouldn't fall around so."

She quickened her steps, fearing the figures might pass beyond her vision and become lost to view.

She was reassured, however, when she reached the garden fence. They were still in sight, and near the chaparral growth where the body of the unfortunate woman had been interred.

Miss Slater gave a nervous start, and clasped her hands.

She had felt all along that that was the point of their destination, and now she was sure of it.

She crouched behind the fence and saw them pass around the edge of the chaparral in the direction of the newly-made grave.

It was not a pistol she had seen gleaming in the moonlight, but a spade.

"Whatever can they mean to do?" she queried, staring with stony gaze, and holding her breath until she was on the point of choking.

She could not determine from her present point of observation; and so she stole softly through the gate, taking care to keep the hinges from creaking, and crept quaking along the route so recently passed over.

The scattered bunches of chaparral greatly aided her advance on the queerly-acting figures; and, after five minutes of stealthy crawling and gliding, she secured a position from which she could look out with unobstructed view.

The woman was standing by the grave, seeming little more than a patch of deeper blackness against the chaparral, while the man was in the grave. Standing in the grave up to his waist, and busily shoveling out the loose soil.

A creepy sensation stole over Miss Sophie Slater, as she watched this unnatural proceeding. It was plain to her that they meant to resurrect the body; and she could not but wonder at the woman's nerve, forgetful that she was exhibiting a nerve equally as firm.

She could see what they were doing, but she could not see who they were. She fancied them to be talking of the work in progress, and she wanted to know what they were saying.

So she began a retrograde, and then a circling, movement that brought her, after infinite pains and care, to within less than a dozen yards of the grave.

Even then she could not see their faces; but their voices she recognized. They were the voices of the brunette, and one of the cowboys named Joe Gilfillan.

Gilfillan was working assiduously; but stopping now and then to address a word to the cloaked figure standing on the edge of the grave.

There was nothing in the talk to give Miss Slater any key to their secret motives. Miss Cushman frequently urged Gilfillan to greater speed, which usually drew from the cowboy a grumbling complaint to the effect that he was already working like an ox and sweating like a horse.

Miss Slater was not long left to crouch there, before she saw the mummy-like body lifted in Gilfillan's strong arms and deposited on the ground. She did not see the body, but only the wrappings in which it was contained. The rude box that served as a coffin was not removed from the grave.

Gilfillan climbed out and moved the body further away, then seized the spade and began to shovel back the dirt he had so laboriously thrown out.

This was a work which did not require a long time; and in a very few minutes the grave was refilled and smoothed down to give it the appearance of not having been disturbed.

Then Miss Cushman glided back toward the house; and Gilfillan lifted the gruesome object he had resurrected, and bore it away into the gloom.

Miss Slater became so weak that she almost fainted at the conclusion of this ghoulish act; but she nevertheless summoned her waning strength, and, as soon as Gilfillan was out of sight, slipped away in Miss Cushman's footsteps.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

THE mail from Chestnut Burr came in, after Frisco Ben had deposited the letter to Lodestone, and when he called for his own mail, the cowboy found a letter from Lodestone notifying him of his return home.

This brought a change in Ben's plans; and, late as it was, he set out for Chestnut Burr, resolved to be himself the bearer of the information.

Lodestone's amazement passed all bounds, as he listened to Frisco's marvelous story. It realized his worst fears; and, after closely questioning the cowboy on all points, he determined to visit Cushman's, in the hope of obtaining further information.

The two departed at once for Silver Hill, and reached Cushman's early in the morning.

They found that Mr. and Mrs. Cushman had returned in the night.

So early was the coming of Lodestone and the cowboy, that Miss Slater did not know of their presence on the place; and hence, she had no opportunity to tell Frisco of her night's experience.

Frisco did not come down the road with Lodestone, fearful of the result of such an act of indiscretion. He sneaked in by the back way, and went straight to the stables to give the horses their morning feed.

Cushman professed great pleasure at seeing Lodestone. They had not met since the election.

"Allow me to congratulate you!" he said, extending his hand with every indication of heartiness. "I must say, you're a sly one! You ought to make politics your trade. I'm sure you'd win in it."

Lodestone took the extended hand, wondering how this man could talk so lightly, while resting under the shadow of so terrible a crime. The mere thought of what had been done almost made his own blood run cold.

Lodestone was evidently uneasy, as Cushman plunged into an animated discussion of the election, and of the events succeeding it. His mind had no room for such things.

"Can this man have murdered his own daughter?" he kept asking himself, as he gave his monosyllabic replies to the fire of comment.

If Cushman was a guilty man, he certainly carried himself with remarkable coolness. Lodestone had always held to the belief that a murderer would inevitably reveal himself by his actions. In short, that murder would out of itself. It did not seem likely that anything of the kind would occur here.

He did not doubt that Cushman knew all about the occurrence of the previous afternoon and evening, though he had been at home but a short time; and so he said:

"It was a remarkable thing, the finding of that body! If it is not asking too much, I should like to take a look at it. A young lady friend of mine left San Francisco last month, and since then has not been heard from. It was thought at first that she had eloped with her lover; but now a belief is growing up that she has been murdered. There are some things in this discovery which have suggested that an examination of the body may possibly lead to a clearing up of the mystery."

Cushman looked at him as if he surely could not have heard aright. Astonishment was never more plainly written on a man's face. It was clear to Lodestone that he had plunged into the subject rather blindly. John Cushman knew nothing about it. Not even that a body had been found.

"I don't quite understand you!" Cushman declared, in a dazed way. "You speak of murder, and of a body being found. You will have to make yourself clearer."

At which Lodestone hastened to tell of what had taken place during Cushman's absence, and of the disposition made of the body.

Cushman rung the bell for one of the servants.

"Send Miss Cushman to me!" he commanded.

Miss Cushman came at once in answer to the summons. It was apparent she knew Lodestone Lem was in the house; and a tell-tale spot of fire burned in either cheek.

"What is this?" looking at her queerly. "Mr. Burton has been telling me a strange story: about this body that was found!"

Lillie hastened to make the necessary explanations.

"It was past midnight when you came in, you know. I meant to tell you the first thing this morning, as soon as I saw you. I have been talking to mamma about it."

There was an air of utter candor. Only the tell-tale spots indicated the feverishness of her bounding pulses.

These were noted by Lodestone, but Cushman seemed to give them no heed.

The latter replied to her account by giving Lodestone's statement of the missing young woman, and of Lodestone's desire to view the remains to settle the question of identity.

The glowing spots fled, and were supplanted by a ghastly whiteness. A startled look came suddenly into the beautiful dark eyes.

This was an indication of guilty knowledge, to Lodestone. He saw she knew more than she would dare to reveal, and thought she did not wish him to get a view of the remains. But Cushman's manner, on the other hand, was extremely bewildering.

Lodestone feared and felt that the body found in the canyon was that of the missing Miss Cushman. If so, and the cook had seen aright, the young lady had been murdered; and this murder had been committed by Cushman, or with his guilty knowledge. But at that moment



Cushman was not acting like a man having guilty knowledge of such a thing. Cushman was too plainly and too evidently puzzled; and, too, his curiosity was being aroused. He was becoming anxious to look at the body for himself.

This was what Lodestone read in Cushman's face.

Cushman got up and rung the bell again, and when a servant appeared, instructed that the cowboys be sent into the yard.

"I hope you can determine whether or not the body is really that of your friend!" he declared, addressing Lodestone in the sincerest manner. "Perhaps we ought to have an officer here when the grave is opened; but I don't know as that will matter. There will be an abundance of witnesses."

Miss Cushman took the opportunity of retreating from the room; but when, a few moments later, Lodestone and Cushman went out into the yard where the cowboys were gathering, they found the young woman and her alleged mother awaiting them.

Gilfillan had come forward with the cowboys, as had also Frisco Ben.

If any one had been paying heed to Sophie Slater, they would have seen that she was the victim of a tremendous excitement. She had not known before that Frisco Ben was on the place; and only when the servants were summoned, did she learn that a visit was to be made to the grave.

There was absolutely no chance, now, for her to hold communication with Ben or Lodestone.

She felt that something ought to be done in advance of the opening of the grave, but she could not make up her mind what to do. A number of considerations kept her silent, not the least of which was a wholesome fear of the dark-eyed beauty.

It was a very solemn procession that moved toward the grave by the chaparral; and even more solemn did the little party become when they reached the yellow mound, and gathered respectfully about it.

It did not take long for the strong-armed cowboys to throw out the fresh earth. There were no indications that the grave had been tampered with.

Lodestone awaited the result with an impatience that was feverish. A sense of horror and dread weighed him down. He shrunk from the thought of looking into the face of the dead, fearing the revelation that might come.

He wondered at Cushman's calmness and imperturbability.

When he looked at Miss Cushman, he fancied she was nervous and agitated. Yet there was a look on her face and in her eyes which he could not then fathom. He thought he understood it, later.

A cry of dismay came from the lips of the cowboys who were in the grave. They shouted that the body was not there. When the grave had been filled in, the lid of the coffin had not been replaced; hence, the absence of the body was discovered as soon as the box was reached.

The crowd surged forward in wild excitement. A glance served to show Lodestone the correctness of the cowboy's statement. The grave was unoccupied.

Exclamations of surprise and amazement passed from lip to lip, followed by questions and surmises innumerable. No adequate theory was broached to account for the disappearance of the body. It seemed a baffling, incomprehensible mystery.

Lodestone glanced quickly from Cushman to the young woman. Cushman was as plainly disconcerted as any one there. As for Miss Cushman, she had drawn her form erect and was looking with white rigidity into the empty grave.

"That woman knows all about this!" was Lodestone's quick thought. "She is the murderer, and has had the body removed to prevent discovery by a possible identification!"

But he could form no satisfactory theory concerning Cushman. The knowledge he had previously gained seemed to fasten the crime on this man, the father of the murdered girl. But Cushman's present actions tended strongly to prove his innocence.

And thus the mystery grew deeper, and Lodestone was forced to confess that he was no nearer its solution than he had been a month before.

He resolved, however, that he would not abandon his search for the truth. He would prosecute it with increased vigor; and he would eventually bring the guilty parties to justice.

It was a herculean task he thus set himself; a thing he realized fully, as he rode thoughtfully away from the Cushman house that forenoon. But herculean tasks have been performed, he assured himself, and can be performed again.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE COMPOSITOR'S LITTLE GAME.

SOPHIE SLATER unburdened her mind to Frisco Ben at the very first opportunity. This opportunity did not come until late that afternoon, and the undivided possession of so great a secret for so long a time almost frenzied her.

Naturally, the cowboy was much surprised when he heard her story. It seemed to prove clearly that Miss Cushman was really guilty of all they had charged her with.

Frisco had not watched Cushman and the girl so closely at the opening of the grave as had Lodestone. Therefore, his inferences were not in all points similar to Lodestone's, even though he had the added knowledge conveyed to him by the cook.

Henceforth, he felt it to be his duty to keep a close watch on Gilfillan.

That night he carried another letter to the Silver Hill post-office for Lodestone Lem.

While in Silver Hill, he visited the marshal of the town, and acquainted him with the discovery made that day. He knew the discovery was public property, or would become public property, and believed Lodestone would desire him to follow that line of action.

He told of the empty grave, but he did not confide to the official the story told to him by Miss Slater. He felt he was not at liberty to do that until he had heard from Lodestone.

He received a reply from Lodestone on the following night, which contained instructions for his future guidance. Lodestone did not deem it best to acquaint the officers with Miss Slater's knowledge, until a later period. In the mean time, Frisco was urged to increased watchfulness of Gilfillan and the Cushmans.

Three days later, the time being a Sunday, Frisco Ben made a personal visit to Chestnut Burr.

He had come on no new sources of information, but he greatly longed for a talk with Lodestone concerning the mystery they were striving to solve. He had talked the subject over with Miss Slater until it was exhausted, and then had re-talked it; and now he desired to confer with his chief.

The fact that it was Sunday made it possible for him to visit Chestnut Burr without danger of attracting undue attention and suspicion. Chestnut Burr was his old home; and what thing could be more natural than his desire to visit it whenever he could?

He did not tarry long to converse with the cronies he chanced to meet on the street; but, as soon as he had put away his horse, hurried to Lodestone's office.

Feeling quite at home, he went around to the rear door, thinking to enter by that way, without knocking.

Lodestone was conversing with some one; and the first words that distinctly reached Frisco Ben's ears caused the cowboy to come to a sudden pause.

They had been spoken by Barnum Yates, the tramp compositor:

"If you don't make it a hundred dollars, I'll blow the whole thing on you!"

It was a threat, uttered in a savage tone.

Frisco Ben drew back, startled. What could the threat mean?

He heard Lodestone reply, in a low voice, but could not catch the words.

"You kin take the risks if you like! You ought to know whether my silence is worth a hundred dollars or not. It's worth that much to me. Not a cent less will buy it!"

Again there was a reply, seemingly of expostulation.

"Not a cent less than a hundred!" Yates declared, still elevating his voice.

"You needn't tell the people on the streets that you're trying to bleed me!"

This was from Lodestone, who was evidently somewhat excited.

Frisco Ben's blood mounted in a threatening way. A cooling sense of self-accusation came to him, however, when he recalled the "booze" he had gone on with the tramp. He had a shadowy and dim recollection of having been indiscreet on that occasion in his talk with Yates. Yet, he could hardly persuade himself that by any possibility he could have said enough to give the tramp a hold on Lodestone. If he had revealed all his knowledge, it would not have been sufficient for that.

"I'll tell the world, if you don't plunk down that hundred!" in a voice that was much lower, but still menacing.

There was no answer to this, except a clinking as if coins were being counted out.

Frisco knew, as well as if he had seen it, that Lodestone was paying over the hundred dollars demanded.

What was he paying it for? What did the tramp know that he should thus be hired to keep silent? The only thing Frisco could think of was the murder of the seaman, John Colby, of which Lodestone had been once accused. But Lodestone had been cleared of that, after a legal investigation.

A sense of burning indignation filled the cowboy. He longed to rush in and throttle the tramp. Prudence, however, held him silent. He was not too much excited to realize that in all probability Lodestone Lem would not desire his presence at that moment.

He had not intended to play eavesdropper, but now that this information had come to him so strangely, he resolved to speak to Lodestone about it, and learn what it meant.

There was some further talk, after the money

had been counted out; then Frisco heard the tramp turn to go.

He remained in his place of concealment behind the building, until he knew Yates was a considerable distance down the street.

The face of Lodestone Lem had a strange and hunted expression, as the cowboy stepped into the room. It took on its characteristic smile, however, when Lodestone saw who his visitor was.

"Sit down!" he said, pushing a chair toward the cowboy. "How are matters progressing at Cushman's? Anything new?"

Frisco did not answer his questions. Instead, he regarded him fixedly, and inquired:

"What did that tramp mean by what he said just now?"

Lodestone was evidently startled.

"He was abusin' you, or threatenin' you about somethin'" sympathetically. "I know that, from what little I heard. Just say the word and I'll go out and everlastin'ly tan his jacket for it!"

Lodestone laughed in a strained and unnatural way.

"I hope you won't think of doing anything so foolish, my dear Ben. I don't know what you heard, and I'm sure I hope you didn't hear much. But whatever it is, it's not a question for you to settle."

Frisco's indignation was increasing. He could see that Lodestone was suffering acutely.

He leaped from the chair and turned toward the door.

"Whether it's fer me or not, I'll settle it, anyway!" he asserted, rolling up a sleeve until his massive arm was revealed. "I'll make theascal's heels break his neck. He'll be willin' to pay back that hundred dollars an' keep his mouth shut, too, before I git through with him!"

"Sit down!" Lodestone commanded, in a tone that brought the irate cowboy to a sudden halt. "I don't want you to interfere in this matter! It isn't a thing that you can settle. I—I—"

There was a tremulousness in the voice unnatural to Lodestone.

"If you put it that way—"

"I do, my dear Ben!" with returning kindness. "I don't want you to say anything to Yates about what you have heard."

"Is it about that Colby matter?"

Lodestone nodded an affirmative.

"I think I understand that!"

"You understand it in part, only."

"But he can't do nothin' with that!" the cowboy averred.

"You're not in a position to say that, as you never heard the whole story. I don't desire to rehearse it now. It's enough to say that Yates has in some manner blundered onto what I've been trying to keep a profound secret. The knowledge makes him dangerous; and so I've chosen to give him the hundred dollars, rather than have him blurt to the world his discovery."

Frisco Ben had sunk weakly and helplessly into a chair, and now stared open-mouthed at his friend. Here was another mystery: sprung into existence under his very nose; and with the first mystery not yet cleared away!

Had Lodestone really committed some crime which now held him in bondage to this repulsive tramp? The cowboy would not believe it.

"I'd feel better if I could thrash him!" Frisco urged.

"No, no! Let him go! Some other time, Frisco, I may have no objections. But just now, I want him let alone."

"It's as you say!" yielding the point, though a scowl of dissatisfaction sat on his face.

"Thank you, Frisco! That's my wish, now."

Frisco twisted uneasily in his chair and looked steadily at his chief.

"I'd think there was somethin' wrong in this, Lodestone, if I didn't know you so well," was his earnest declaration. "Whatever you say goes! I know you haven't done anything that ain't right, no matter what the surface color may show. I've always found you the clean, white article, an' it's too late to begin b'lievin' you anythin' else."

"Thank you, Frisco!" said Lodestone, again. "I hope you may never have cause to regret your loyalty!"

With that he dismissed the subject, and turned to a discussion of the matters that had caused the cowboy to visit Chestnut Burr that day.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### AN EAVESDROPPER.

"TAKE that, will you? And that!"

Frisco Ben gave a sanguinary kick at the air, and at the same time struck out savagely with his big right fist.

He was in the stable, whither he had gone to get his horse, and had just come from Lodestone Lem's office. There was no one to witness this exclamatory and pugilistic outburst, and he had been burning for some time to give his feelings vent.

Lodestone's subjection to the tramp filled him with indignation; and in striking out so savagely, he was pummeling an imaginary Yates in a fashion to delight the heart of a Sullivan.

"Take that, will you?" dealing another kick



and a blow. "Treat a decent man that way, will you?"

His boot struck against the boards of the stable, and the crash seemed to recall him to his senses.

"If it only had 'a' been him!"

He glared out through the stable door in the direction in which he had last seen the tramp going, gave his fist a final shake, and then turned to his horse.

His mind was in a turmoil of doubt and uncertainty. Only Lodestone's emphatic injunction kept him from searching out and attacking Yates.

"There's somethin' awful cur'us about that thing," addressing the animal he was saddling. "It knocks me clean silly! The idear of Lodestone a-payin' that feller a hundred dollars! And what he paid it to him fer, I jist can't 'magine. It can't be that Colby business."

Two or three times as he rode through the streets of the town, he brought his horse to a stop and seemed about to turn back, overwhelmed by his intense longing to whip Yates. But each time the pained face of Lodestone Lem arose before him. Then he would continue on his way, filling the air with whispered maledictions.

Lodestone had not enjoined him to secrecy in the matter; and as soon as he reached Cushman's, and the chance presented, he confided the strange story to Miss Sophie Slater. The chance did not come, however, until some time after nightfall, and, as Frisco reached the house before sundown, the wait proved most tedious and wearisome.

Miss Slater's sympathies were instantly aroused. She had taken a great liking to Lodestone, influenced thereto largely, no doubt, by the love she had conceived for Ben. Hence, Frisco found in her an interested listener to all he had to say.

"But I'll settle with that there Yates, yit!" the cowboy savagely declared. "Lodestone can't always keep me still, this-a-way; and if that tramp don't git out o' the country, he'll always wisht he had; fer by stayin', he'll git the awfulest whippin' of his life!"

Sophie drew closer to him, as if to show her appreciation of these brave words and of the courageous man who gave them utterance.

"I don't like to have you fight, Ben, though I do wish you'd thrash him!" she averred.

"Why don't you want me to fight?" passing an arm slyly about her plump waist.

"Well, you might git hurt you know; and—what then would become of me?"

"It'd give you a fine chance to nuss me back to health ag'in!" pressing her still closer and implanting a sounding kiss on her full lips. "That's what it would, Sophie; an', seems to me, that for that reason you'd be powerful glad if I did git into a shindy one't in awhile."

Sophie struggled to free herself, as in duty bound, but not in a very resolute manner; and Ben clasped her yet nearer.

"That's all right Sophie! I'm a-speakin' only the truth. Seems to me ye ought to be glad at a thing like that!"

"Why Ben!" giving him a little slap as a rebuke.

"I've been thinkin' of the time when I'll be a-wantin' to be sick frum month's eend to month's eend!"

"How's that?"

"When we git married, you know! I'd want to stay in the house the endurin' time, an' have you wait on me; an' I don't know how else I'd 'complish it, if I didn't play sick."

Sophie released herself, by an effort.

Ben did not attempt to reclasp her. Instead, he sat quite still for a moment, staring at the inner door—the door that communicated with the other portions of the house.

Sophie followed the direction of his gaze, wondering what he meant by it.

The cowboy did not enlighten her; but got up very softly, tip-toed to the door, threw it open, and looked into the corridor.

He saw nothing to reward him for his trouble. The corridor was deserted and only half lighted. But he was unsatisfied, and went further on, to make his examination more complete. Sophie followed to the door, looking curiously and questioningly after him.

"There was somebody a-spyin' on us!" was his positive assertion, as he returned to the kitchen and carefully closed the door. "I heard 'em!"

"Are you quite sure?" clasping her hands excitedly.

"I don't think they could 'a' been any mistake about it. I heard 'em a-steppin' jist as soft, makin' no more noise than a mouse would. I couldn't 'a' been mistaken."

The cook was much agitated, recalling the things Ben had just been saying.

"Who was it, do you suppose?"

Ben shook his head.

"I couldn't say as to that. But I might make a guess. Who'd be likely to want to spy on us? It must 'a' been either Mr. Cushman, or the girl. An' whoever it was, I'm afraid they heard somethin' they oughtn't to."

The cowboy was not thinking of the love talk, but of what had preceded it. In all probability, the eavesdropper had heard his account

of the strange occurrence at Lodestone's office. He had detailed that affair in full to the cook, with all of his surmises concerning it. This knowledge might prove a dangerous weapon in the hands of an enemy.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A DESPERATE WOMAN.

FRISCO BEN was not mistaken in thinking he had heard some one in the corridor.

Miss Cushman's distrust of the cook and her lover had been of brief growth, but it was strong; and as a result, she had set herself to spying on their movements.

She had observed the perplexed look in the cowboy's face that evening; and rightly judging that he would communicate his thoughts to Miss Sophie Slater at the first favoring moment, concealed herself in the corridor to hear what he might say.

To render her eavesdropping the more safe, she removed her shoes; and thus was able to make a hasty flight and escape detection.

What she heard filled her active mind with a thousand suggestions. Being base and deceptive herself, she was ready to believe that Lodestone Lem possessed similar characteristics; and the account of the scene in Lodestone's office, and the payment of hush-money to the tramp, seemed positive proof.

A fierce love for this man had grown up in her heart—a love that was becoming an absorbing and consuming passion. She had used her utmost wiles to entrap him, and had failed. All her pretty affectations, her wit, her beauty, her versatility, seemed of no effect. He might as well have been an image of stone on which she was lavishing her love, as far as outward appearances went. Her scorching and half-veiled passion made no impression on this man.

Hence, she was ready to hail with delight anything which promised to give her a leverage by which she might move him. What her arts had failed to do, the persuasiveness of threats might accomplish. If she only knew what was the influence wielded by the tramp, she might be able to use the same influence in her own behalf.

She was not so blind but that she saw Lodestone's love for the missing girl was the main obstacle standing in the way of the accomplishment of her purpose. With his heart filled with that love, there was no room in it for another; and this knowledge engendered a bitter hatred of even the memory of the girl who had preceded her.

She had readily fallen into Mrs. Cushman's scheme of marrying her to Lodestone; and his utter failure to pay any attention to her was the most nettling experience of her life.

"He shall acknowledge my power!" was her mental exclamation, on regaining her room after her flight from the corridor. "I'll force him to marry me, whether I win his love or not. He shall do that, or I'll disgrace him forever!"

Shrewd and wise as she was, she was not shrewd enough nor wise enough to see that the hand of a man thus obtained in marriage would not be worth the possessing. She was influenced, however, as much by a desire for revenge for the slights she had felt, as by any other consideration. To thus subject him to her power would be to counterbalance her own deep humiliation.

Almost until morning she sat there in the privacy of her room, forgetting even to put on her shoes, and thought and re-thought the matter over in all its bearings.

With the first faint light of day, she got out writing materials and penned a note to Mr. Barnum Yates; and, immediately after breakfast, she took this note to Silver Hill and mailed it with her own hand, making the journey to and from the town in the family carriage.

Then she returned to her spying, and to a patient waiting for Yates's revelation.

Yates received the letter thus mailed to him, and decided to call on the woman. His knowledge was worth money, as he had already proven, and he would sell it to the highest bidder. There might be more money for him in this new direction, than in blackmailing Lodestone; and then, there was the possibility that he might get payments from both parties.

He waited until Lodestone absented himself from Chestnut Burr, and then made a hasty trip to Silver Hill, and the Cushman residence.

He arrived at the latter place after dark, in accordance with his wish to pass unobserved.

He had notified Miss Cushman by mail of his proposed coming. She was in waiting to receive him, and at once conducted him to the seclusion of the parlor. The curtains of this room had been drawn, and the small lamp burning there was turned low.

Yates had a clean face, on this occasion. He had combed his beard and hair, and was rigged out in his best clothing. This was a cheap suit, purchased at second-hand in Chestnut Burr, but it greatly altered his looks for the better.

"I'm hyer, ma'am," he said, "cordin' to agreement; and as I've got to git back before mornin', whatever business you've got to talk

might as well be got at at one't. Money is the article that speaks the loudest, when Barnum Yates has got his ear to the telephone."

Miss Cushman could scarcely conceal the loathing with which she regarded him. At his best, Barnum Yates was not a pleasant creature to invite into one's parlor, and to thus sit conversing with by the dim light of a lamp.

"It has come to my ears that by reason of some secret which you possess, you are able to extract money from the man known as Lodestone Lem."

Yates was already aware that she knew this, as her note had told him that.

"An' you want to buy the secret?" rubbing his yellow fingers together. "I've got a secret, ma'am; and it's fer sale to the highest bidder. But you'll hev to come down with the ducats before I open my head about it. No credit business with me. Credit business is the ruin of merchants!"

She did not like his dogged attitude, though she was forced to pass it over, good-humoredly.

"Do you consider yourself a merchant?"

"Yes'm! A merchant is a man who has a thing to sell. No goods except fer spot cash. You kin buy, er you kin let it alone. What I know is worth money to me; an' if you want it, you'll hev to pay fer it!"

His words and tones were almost offensive. But Barnum Yates did not adopt this style of address, except after mature reflection. He reasoned that an independent spirit would convince her more than all else of the value of his information, and so increase her desire to obtain it.

In this, he exhibited much astuteness, not to say insight into character. Miss Cushman was disgusted with his appearance, and irritated by his words. She had a strong desire to order him out of the house. Yet spoke as oily and witchingly as if he were a man to be admired.

"How am I to know if your secret is worth paying for?" she inquired. "Or how much it is worth?"

"I can't tell you that, ma'am. I only know how much it's worth to me. It's already brought me a hundred dollars; an' I reckon that fer the next six months, it'll bring me a cool hundred a month. Mebbe you 'kin judge by that what it'd be worth to you."

"It might be worth all of that to you, and nothing at all to me!" she averred, looking thoughtfully at him. "Couldn't you give me a hint of its nature? Something by which I could form an opinion of what its probable value may be to me?"

The tramp winked, knowingly.

"You're a cute 'un, miss! If anybody could worm a secret out of a feller, I reckon you'd be that one. But they ain't nothin' 'ceptin' the hard ducats what gits this! Nothin' but jinglin' coin!"

She bit her lip in vexation.

"I'm afraid we can't trade, then!"

"Very well, then, ma'am!" very coolly and undisturbedly.

She was doing some rapid thinking, going over the ground she had gone over a dozen times before. She had no idea what this secret might be, though in Frisco Ben's talk to the cook, there had been a mysterious mention of a seaman named John Colby. What this seaman had to do with the case, if anything, was unknown to her.

"I'll ask you one question," looking again at the tramp, "and if the answer suits me, perhaps we may come to terms. Does this secret concern a sailor known as John Colby?"

Yates could not repress a start of surprise.

"He is dead, I believe?" in the same inquiring tone, after noting with satisfaction the tramp's astonished air.

"It was a murder, was it not?"

This was only blind guess-work, but it was hitting uncomfortably near the mark; and all the tramp's art was needed to hide from her the truth.

"If you know all about it, why, go on!" he growled. "I baint said nothin', yit about a sailor or a murder, er nothin'!"

"But I know I'm on the right track!" and there was a growing confidence in her voice.

Yates was wondering how she had made her discoveries, though he discreetly held his tongue.

"I reckon you don't need me, then, if you know all about it a'ready!" and he began to toy with his greasy hat, as if meditating a departure.

"I just wanted to show you that your knowledge may not be so valuable as you think," with a laughing kind of slyness. "I know the main facts, but I don't know the details. I sent for you to supply them. How I got my information isn't here nor there."

"You know the terms!" he grumbled. "You kin come to 'em or not, jist as you like. But they's one thing! I ain't a-goin' to set hyer an' talk all night!"

"Not even with a good-looking young lady?"

"Blow the good-lookin' young ladies! I'm after dust, I am; and if this house ain't got any fer me, it's time I was a-goin'!"

"How much will you take to tell me all about that affair?"

"Five hundred dollars!"



The words were hurled almost fiercely at her. "I can't pay it!" very decidedly. "I haven't that much money."

He could see she was in earnest in this.

"What will ye pay?" he queried, still toying with his disreputable hat. "Four hundred?"

"I'll give you just two hundred dollars. That's all I can pay, and all I will pay! I've got at the main body of your secret, and if you don't want to sell me what else there is of it for that amount, you can go."

Yates had come there with great expectations. Now, he saw he would have to lower his figures.

"We'll split the difference," he said. "Make it three hundred, and I'll tell you all I know."

"Not a cent over what I've named!" was her positive declaration.

She was thus positive for two reasons. She believed Yates would come to terms, and two hundred dollars exhausted her entire resources.

Yates hesitated awhile, and fumbled with his hat, but finally yielded.

"Show me the color o' yer coin!" he agreed.

There was a little stand in the room, and from it she took a large purse containing twenty-dollar gold pieces, ten of them. She had brought them in there that evening, to have them ready in case she should be forced to pay that amount.

She counted the ten coins out on the table, but did not pass them over to him.

"There it is," she said. "Tell me what you know of this affair—all about the secret you hold over the head of Lodestone Lem—and the money is yours. But if you try to fool me by speaking falsely, you'll not get a cent."

She was very resolute, but feverish with excitement. Her cheeks were hot and scarlet, and her eyes glittered.

Barnum Yates hastened to tell his story, eying the coins with greedy gaze.

Lodestone Lem had killed a seaman named John Colby, the murder having been committed in San Francisco, two years before. There was a robbery, as well as a murder, the seaman's watch and purse and all his valuables having been taken. Lodestone had been arrested for the crime, but was released because of insufficient evidence to convict. That evidence could now be furnished, as the tramp believed; and the threat of producing this evidence was what had drawn the payment from the Chestnut Burr champion.

"And this evidence?" Miss Cushman put in, when the tramp had reached this point of his story. "Of what does it consist?"

It was the important point of the narrative.

"There is a witness what kin he brought forward. His name is Ezra Tanner, and he lives near the waterside in Frisco. Down by the bay, in an old tumble-down house."

He drew a bit of paper toward him, fished the stub of a pencil out of his pocket, and made a rude diagram of the water-side streets of San Francisco; then pointed out and made clear the location of the house occupied by Ezra Tanner.

The information was complete in all its details, and satisfied her; and after they had discoursed of Tanner and his value as a witness for a long time, she pushed the coins to the tramp.

He received them greedily, thrust them into the depths of his pockets, and hurriedly took his departure.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

HAVING obtained the information which promised so much, Miss Cushman began to plot and plan how she might best use it to advantage. She had acquaintances in San Francisco, and to these she wrote concerning Ezra Tanner. There was a man named Ezra Tanner, she was told, living in a very quiet way at the place described. This seemed to prove the truth of the tramp's assertions, and so satisfied her that it was safe to move forward.

In the mean time, Lodestone Lem was not idle. He had been pushing his inquiries quietly, though he had made comparatively little progress in his investigations.

Under his instructions, Frisco Ben had continued his researches in the hills, ostensibly for traces of silver ore, but really to look for the body of the woman which had been so mysteriously borne away by Gilfillan. But Ben could find nothing, in spite of his constant endeavors.

Everything, however, tended to show that Miss Cushman had guilty knowledge of the disappearance of the young woman who first bore that name; and Lodestone Lem again called on her, in the vain hope of surprising her into a betrayal of her secret.

She was arrayed in a most charming manner, on the evening in which he called, and greeted him with a fervor which could not pass unnoted by so shrewd an observer.

He was made to feel her love for him. Every word and movement breathed a passionate fondness.

All this had on him an effect contrary to that which she desired. He could not but acknowledge her beauty, but he felt like turning from

her with loathing, for the picture drawn by Sophie of this woman standing by the grave, was ever present in his mind.

Still, in his intense desire to gain some information of the missing girl, he repressed this feeling, and strove to make himself as agreeable as possible.

But in the midst of her most entertaining talk, the startling question would suddenly obtrude itself: "Is this lovely creature a murderess?"

By every art known to the enchantress, she tried to induce him to declare his love for her. She seemed familiar with every subject, discussing art and literature as intelligently as she did irrigating and the reclamation of the mesas. She had a good voice, and entertained him with a number of vocal efforts, accompanying herself on the instrument.

Yet do what she would, talk as she might, he remained comparatively cold and impassive. Her liveliest sallies, and her warmest and most pointed love ditties scarcely moved him. He was gracious and seemingly kind, but she could see that there was no love back of his commendatory expressions.

She turned from these things to the fight at Chestnut Burr—the great contest for the Alcatraz land, and asked him about it.

"Don't you think I might help you there?" she slyly queried. "I'm almost afraid to tell you what a schemer I am, when I direct my efforts along that line."

Judging by past experience, he could not doubt she would prove a host, if she gave herself persistently to such a thing.

"I could make you victorious, Mr. Burton!"

"Would you?" he questioned, looking in her eyes to discover her hidden meaning.

"I could if it was made worth my while—if I could see wherein I should be the gainer by it!"

He continued to look at her, inquiringly.

"None are so blind as those who will not see!" she quoted. "I'm afraid you don't want to understand me. In what way could I be in a position to help you most?"

He knew now what she meant.

"This is leap year, is it not?" she airily went on.

"You mean if I should marry you, you would be willing to use your arts of scheming to further my cause?"

"I would make you victorious!" she whispered. "I hope you won't think me unwomanly, Mr. Burton! If I am, pardon it! It is my great desire to aid you, and my love for you that has driven me to say this."

He did not answer, but said:

"You would not turn against your own father? My fight is with him, you know!"

"A woman might turn against her father for her husband's sake!" with an arch frankness that was very winning, in spite of the unfemininity of her previous speech. "Don't you think so?"

"In what way could you help me?" fighting shy of anything that might seem a committal.

"In a thousand ways!" she exclaimed, breathing the very essence of fiery resolution. "I tell you, I could make you victor in this fight!"

The sentence held a hissing sound, which, together with her manner and attitude, made her seem so like a jeweled and twining serpent that he involuntarily drew back.

"You loathe me! You hate me!" she cried, springing to her feet with passionate indignation. "I can see it in your face! In your eyes! I am but as the dirt under your feet!"

"Sit down!" he commanded, striving to calm her by the very dispassionateness of his own tones. "You should not accuse yourself thus."

"It is true, is it not?" looking at him with a hot wrath that was somewhat subdued by her sense of humiliation.

"I have said nothing to justify this outburst. On your own motion, you asked me to marry you."

"And you declared you would not!"

"Did I? Then it must have been by actions instead of words."

"Actions speak louder than words," she observed. "But what am I speaking of? I wish you would go away and never come here again, Mr. Burton. I really do! I shall never forgive myself for what I have just said in your presence."

The tell-tale red spots, always indicative of intense mental excitement, were glowing in her cheeks. Her manner was *distracted* and nervous. Quite different from what it had been only so short a time before.

Lodestone Lem had almost a feeling of pity for her; a pity that was impregnated with dislike and disgust. He could not but realize that she was a woman, and however low she may have fallen, entitled to some consideration on account of her sex. Besides, she loved him. This was all too plain. Did she not deserve something because of that?

But with these kindly thoughts thronging his mind, there arose the old picture of this woman standing before the half-open grave, in the blackness of the night, urging Gilfillan to a removal of the body found in the canyon. The feeling brought by this picture almost swept away his growing charity.

"I have disgraced myself!" she wailed; "for

you do not love me! You never can love and marry me!"

"I'm afraid I cannot," he confessed, his voice showing the harshness of his new thoughts.

She turned on him with the fierceness of a tiger.

Not until she did this, did he realize that up to that moment she had been playing a part; a part intended solely to work on his sympathies. It was only too apparent, now.

"You say you do not care for me; you can never love me; you will never marry me! Perhaps there may be something that will change your mind on these subjects."

The words were breathed in a tense way, resembling the hissing of a serpent, recalling more strongly than ever the snaky character she had seemed to him to possess.

She was glaring at him, now; glaring fiercely and menacingly.

"I don't know that I comprehend you," surprised at the startling change. "Do you mean to threaten me?"

"Ay! that I do, Lodestone Lem!" using the title by which she had never before addressed him. "And you may understand that I can make my words good!"

"What do you mean by that?"

She seemed to have abandoned prudence, together with all her little feminine artifices, as if solely relying on the power she believed herself able to wield over this man.

"I wanted you to let me help you. To let me help you as your wife;—but you sneered at my proposal. You thought it unwomanly, perhaps. Very well; there may be things more unwomanly than the mere taking advantage of a leap-year privilege. If you won't let me help you, you can't hinder me from ruining you."

He saw that she possessed some knowledge which she hoped to use to advantage, though he could not guess what that knowledge was.

"Yes, I will ruin you, Lodestone Lem!" she impetuously continued. "I can and will! If you will not let me assist you, I will bring about your downfall!"

He was staring bewilderedly at her. She was as fierce as an aroused lioness.

"Will you please explain what you mean?"

"I'm only too willing to do so!" and she faced him sternly. "You have been hiding a dangerous secret in your breast—a secret that I have discovered. You remember John Colby, the seaman?"

He could not repress a start and look of anxiety.

"Ah! the shot struck home! I see you do remember Colby!"

"What of him?" he hoarsely questioned.

"Colby was murdered and robbed, and you were accused of the double crime."

He shrunk back as if a blow had been struck at him.

"You were accused of the double crime!" she repeated, noting with secret satisfaction the pain so plainly marked on his face. "They couldn't prove it against you, then, but it can be proved, now; and it will be proved!"

"If I don't make you the beloved wife of my bosom, I suppose?" and a sneer curled his lips.

"That is my meaning!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

"THAT is not the usual way in which matches are made!"

The sneer that still sat on his lips, together with the words, caused her cheeks to flame.

"You think I don't mean what I say! That I can't do what I threaten. If you rely on that, Mr. Burton, your reliance will fail you."

"Who told you that fairy story about John Colby?" not replying to her. "It is a very pretty story; but, unfortunately for you, it isn't true!"

This was said so confidently that for a moment she feared she had been deceived by the tramp. But she recalled the contents of the letter relating to Ezra Tanner, which her San Francisco friends had sent her. Nor was she forgetful of Lodestone's startled look when Colby's name was first mentioned.

"I think it's true!" she asserted. "I know it's true!"

"It's well to have profound belief in one's convictions!" with mocking deference. "It's conducive to sound sleep and good digestion."

"You haven't denied the charge, yet!"

"Oh, haven't I? Then, I'll hasten to save your peace of mind."

"You didn't murder and rob John Colby, the sailor?"

"I did not!"

"And you know nothing about it, I suppose?"

"My dear young woman, that is a very different matter! I denied that I committed the crimes you so boldly charge against me."

She stopped in her restless paces up and down the room, and looked at him as if to read his inmost thoughts.

"You haven't told me where you got that fairy story?" firmly returning her fiery glances. She made no answer.

"I think I could guess. It must have been a very unsavory individual, known as Barnum Yates, whom I have been foolish enough to keep



employed about my office. You needn't confess it, if you've not a mind to. You couldn't have got it anywhere else."

"Yes; I got it of Yates!" she affirmed, driven to desperation.

"And paid him for it, of course! If that fellow had as much genius as he has rascality, he might be a rich man. But I fancy he's overreached himself."

"Yates told me everything!" she asserted. "Everything! All about Ezra Tanner, of San Francisco, the man you've been keeping hidden away, for fear he might testify against you."

"It was very kind of Yates to take you into his confidence! But he told you more than he knew. A great deal more!"

"I shall make use of it, at any rate!"

"I don't think you will, Miss Cushman!" and his tones were very firm and stern. "I have a little knowledge that I think will counter all your suspicions. You don't really know anything; and I do!"

Her face became white. There was such a change in his manner.

"You wouldn't want me to tell to the world what I know about the disappearance of your alleged cousin."

"It wouldn't surprise the world a great deal to learn that she had gone to New York, would it?"

"Perhaps not; but it would surprise it to learn of the uncanny interest you took in the body of the woman found in the canyon."

Her face became whiter, and she stopped her restless tramping to sink into a chair.

He saw she was waiting for him to proceed, stilled into breathlessness.

"It was not what you did when the body was brought openly to the house, but your actions afterward. To ask you a pointed question, Miss Cushman: Why did you and Gilfillan remove the body secretly from its grave in the night? If you'll answer me that, plainly and directly, perhaps I'll tell you more about John Colby. Everybody knows that the grave was found empty the next day; but everybody don't know that you and Gilfillan took away the body!"

She sat rigidly, clutching at the arm of the chair.

"Knowing all this as I do, it strikes me you'll not be in too great haste to inform the world of what you fancy you know about John Colby—even if I don't marry you!"

"There's not a word of truth in it!" she managed to ejaculate. "I don't know what you are talking about!"

"Maybe it won't hurt to speak a little plainer. Miss Lillie Cushman, this alleged cousin of yours was murdered. Her body was thrown into the canyon where it was found by Frisco Ben. It was buried back there by the chaparral, and you and Gilfillan resurrected it and bore it to some unknown spot, lest another examination should be made and the identity of the body be established."

His talk was giving her time to think, and she was rapidly recovering from the effects of her shock.

"So, we are a pair of murderers, are we?" and she looked at him mockingly, and with starry eyes. "You killed John Colby, and I killed this most excellent young woman. The transactions place us on a level. I see no reason, then, why we shouldn't marry. It would be such a splendid match!"

She laughed, in a harsh way.

"To think that I murdered my cousin, Lillie Cushman!"

She inadvertently raised her voice; and now the door of the room was thrown open, revealing John Cushman on the threshold.

He had heard her statement, as well as some of the previous talk, and he was much excited.

"What's all this nonsense?" he bluntly demanded. "This talk of murder, and the like?"

Lodestone Lem faced him without a tremor.

Miss Cushman laughed again, in a very hysterical way. Her nerves were wrought up to the breaking point.

"Why don't you answer my question?" Cushman hotly inquired. "Is this the way for a gentleman to do, Burton? Come into my house and accuse its inmates of murder?"

The discussion had reached a pass unthought of by the originators of it. Lodestone saw that Cushman was intensely angry, and that an explanation must be made. He decided to face him boldly. These two had been at war now for a long time, and he had suffered much at Cushman's hands. He recalled with painful distinctness the whipping which Cushman had administered as the masked leader, and the stripes seemed to swell and burn again on his back.

"In doing so, I only replied to another accusation. I was accused of murder by this very charming young lady, and I retorted with a like charge. She can't prove what she says, and I can!"

"And that is what?"

Lodestone saw he must take the bull by the horns.

"That the young lady I first saw here as Lillie Cushman, and who told me she was your daughter, was murdered; that her body was afterward found; and that it was removed

from the grave then prepared for it, by Gilfillan and this young woman. This young woman who claims to be your only daughter!"

Cushman broke into a strange and curious cackle.

"Lodestone, you're as mad as a March hare!"

"It's true, every word of it!" Lodestone asserted. "It's true, John Cushman, and you ought to know it! You do know it!"

"I know nothing of the kind; but I do know that you don't know what you're talking about. The young lady you saw was never murdered, and this young lady is my daughter."

"Your only daughter, I presume!" doubtfully.

"Very true! My only daughter!"

"If the other young lady was not murdered, where is she, then?"

"That's rather cool, Burton! I ought to reply, and will reply, by telling you that it's none of your business, and that I am entirely capable of attending to my own family affairs without your intervention!"

Lodestone Lem saw he had blundered.

"If you think there has been murder committed here, why don't you go to the police and cause arrests to be made?" Cushman sarcastically continued.

Lodestone had thought on that point many times. He never had done so, because he feared he had not sufficient proof, and for the additional reason that he did not yet desire to, feeling that the time had not yet come.

He could not say this much, however, to John Cushman.

"I think you will confess that many suspicious things have occurred," he declared, bravely enough, still sternly facing Cushman. "I don't think I ought to be blamed for the thoughts they have produced. Would you not yourself consider the removal of the body from the grave a strange circumstance?"

"I have thought it so, yes!" Cushman admitted.

Lodestone was not quite prepared for this.

"You have thought it so?"

"That's what I said. Rather a strange circumstance; and it has puzzled me!"

"Then, you don't know who did it?"

Miss Cushman leaped to her feet, pale and trembling. She had motioned to Lodestone Lem to drop the question, but he had not understood her, or had not heeded.

"So you know something about it?" and Cushman looked bewilderedly at her.

"I know all about it, father. I will explain to you at another time. Because of the knowledge I have on the subject, he accuses me of killing my cousin."

It was so clear Cushman was really puzzled, that a series of struggling doubts and questions arose in Lodestone's mind. He had always believed these two understood each other perfectly, and that, therefore, if the crime he had been charging on them was really committed by them, each must know all about it. Then, why should this young woman conceal from Cushman the part she had taken in causing the removal of the body? It was an unanswerable question.

On being assured that she knew all about it, and would explain later, Cushman dropped the subject and turned from her to Lodestone.

"Is there any sense in pursuing your present policy, Lodestone?" was his blunt inquiry. "You are muddling your head with matters you do not understand, and can never understand unless we choose to make them clear."

"And this fight you are making for the crazy gang over at Chestnut Burr! Wouldn't it be the part of wisdom for you to drop it? I have made offers to you before, and am as ready to compromise to-day, as when I made them. The land syndicate will take you into full partnership, giving you a share equal to that of any other member, if you'll consent that they may."

"I couldn't do it!" Lodestone determinedly answered.

"Then, you will please me by making your visits to this house as few as possible in number."

He turned toward Miss Cushman as if he meant to accompany her from the room; and Lodestone, seeing that his presence was no longer desired, groped his way into the hall, got his hat, and left the place without ceremony.

It had been an eventful evening, and yet he was not sure he had accomplished anything. The blow at the young woman had struck hard. He knew that, though he was not tenacious of any other fact. He felt reasonably sure of one thing, however. Lillie Cushman would hesitate a long while before endeavoring to push the John Colby matter.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A PROPHECY OF VICTORY.

AMID all these many excitements, Lodestone Lem had not been unmindful of the interests of Chestnut Burr. His was the guiding hand, as it had ever been.

The unexpected victory achieved in his elevation to the Legislature had increased his influence in many ways. It was coming to be believed throughout the country that in this great battle against the Land Pirates, he would eventually

win; and because of this belief, strong partisans and men who hoped to gain by his victory, flocked to his standard.

He had already, to some extent, outlined his plan of action; and never an issue of the *Spine* but contained references to what was denominated the Alcatraz land steal, and fiery exhortations of its manipulators, chief among whom was John Cushman.

Lodestone Lem saw that the fight must become more bitter ere the day of success dawned; and this was in his mind in conjunction with the mystery, as he made his way homeward after that exciting visit to Cushman's residence.

He realized, too, that if peril had thickly hemmed him in before, it would menace more bristlingly in the future than in the past. He had not only John Cushman to fight, now, but John Cushman's daughter; and he accounted her a more dangerous foe than the Land Pirate leader himself. To a woman's wit, he believed she added the cunning vindictiveness of a fiend. Her enmity would be sleepless and far-reaching. Better the enmity of a dozen men than of one such woman.

His first act the next day was to visit the newspaper office and confront Barnum Yates with his treachery.

The tramp quailed before the flashing eyes of his employer, and became whiningly penitent.

"I paid you that hundred dollars to keep you silent on this subject!" Lodestone declared. "Not that I feared you could injure me, but for other reasons. I want you to understand that you can't injure me, no matter what you tell. But you promised to keep still, and this is how you did it. You sold out to that woman, and told her all you knew!"

Yates was a crafty fellow; but, crafty as he was, he could not form any sufficient excuse for this act of duplicity.

"I didn't think she could do anything with it, boss!" he said, with downcast head, and watching Lodestone out of the corners of his eyes. "I really didn't; and that's the truth!"

His employer's wrath was not to be thus appeased.

"You're a miserable, crawling sneak, and I was a fool for ever having anything to do with you; and a double fool for paying you that money as I did! But you'll know it when you get another cent out of me, either in wages or as a bribe!"

Barnum Yates lifted his head, and the old threatening look was in his face.

"You'd better think twice about that, boss. You kin talk as you please, but I hev a sneakin' notion that you wouldn't want the world to know what I could tell it about that Colby business."

"You can tell as soon as you like! I've paid you the last cent you'll ever get out of me!"

"An' if I fetch up that witness, Ezra Tanner?"

Lodestone laughed a hard, curious laugh.

"You'll find him first!"

The tramp's looks changed to those of surprise.

"What do ye mean by that?" he snarled.

"Just what I said. You'll have to find him before you can produce him."

"I reckon I know where he is!"

"Where he was, not is!"

The tramp's jaw dropped.

"Perhaps I'm not as big a fool, Yates, as you took me to be; not as big a fool as I seemed when I paid you that money. I feel like kicking myself for that, yet. You can go ahead and produce Tanner just as soon as you like. When you find him, send me word, will you? I knew you'd want more money after awhile, and so I took a little pains to head off your demand. It's well I did, too, seeing what you've done."

At this Yates flew into a violent rage.

"I reckon I kin publish to the world what I know of the Colby business, even if you hev run Tanner off so that I can't find him! It'll make mighty interestin' readin', with scare head-lines, on the first pages of the big dailies."

"Give it to the press as soon as you like!" was the stern reply. "Perhaps the sooner you do it the better. Then the thing will become public property, and your fancied power will be gone. But whatever you do, you go out of this office this morning. I've stood your presence and threats as long as I'm able to."

He pointed commandingly to the door.

"There's the hole left by the carpenters, and if you don't want me to pitch you through it, you'll hasten your exit."

"They hev their exits an' their entrances, an' each man in his time plays many parts," the tramp compositor quoted, assuming a mocking deference. "If I go out now, I'll come back ag'in, an' you may bet I'll hev another part to play. You're a-foolin' yourself if you think you kin down Barnum Yates this easy!"

He took his hat from its peg, rolled down his sleeves very deliberately and put on his coat, and slouched through the doorway.

"Tal' tal'!" he cried, facing about as he gained the street. "I'll be comin' fer ye ag'in one of these days, an' I'd 'vise ye to git another hundred ready."

Then he was gone, leaving Lodestone to fume and stew over the occurrence at his leisure.



Another compositor was installed the next day, and the work of getting out the paper recommenced.

Lodestone Lem took occasion in that week's issue to hint even stronger than ever regarding the line of action he purposed to pursue in fighting the Land Pirates. His editorial on the subject was in the nature of a prophecy—a prophecy of victory.

On another page pointed charges were made against the newly-elected judge—charges of incompetency and drunkenness; and, to those who were conversant with the matter, this foreshadowed an effort at impeachment, when the Legislature should convene.

It was a lively issue of the *Spine*, and made hot reading for the politicians and people of the excitable district.

It showed, too, that Lodestone Lem proposed to push the great battle with even more vigor than that hitherto exhibited.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ADELINE RIDGES.

AMONG the bright young men drawn to Chestnut Burr by the fame of its prosperity, was Walter Creston. He was an attorney, well versed in mining laws, and hoped to do a good business in his profession at that point. Chestnut Burr was situated in an irrigable belt, surrounded by some of the finest mines of the State—the finest, at least, since the days of the great Comstock Lode.

All this promised much lucrative mining practice, of which young Walter Creston hoped to take advantage.

He had become one of Lodestone Lem's firmest friends and strongest adherents, and had joined hands with the champion of Chestnut Burr in his battle against the pirates who were attempting to steal the great Alcatraz empire of lands.

Yet he knew little enough of Lodestone Lem's life—especially of his past life—and nothing at all of his secrets.

This is nothing to be wondered at. People as a rule do not inquire closely into such matters. This is true in the Eastern cities, and it is even more true in the newer cities of the new West.

Creston was sitting in his office one pleasant day, leaning negligently back in an office chair, and with his feet elevated on the window-sill, the window being open. It was a pleasant place to sit, for a cool breeze came in, tempering the intense heat; and it frequently gets terrifically hot in mid-day on the plateau of Nevada.

Creston had a law-book in his lap, which he was conning attentively; but not so attentively as to prevent him from looking occasionally at the passers-by in the street. There was usually much stir and excitement on these thoroughfares, with incidents worthy of observation. Creston was a student of the human face, as well as of law books, and it delighted him to watch the varying physiognomies that passed his window. They formed an interesting study, and relieved the mental strain which too great a digging at law was apt to occasion.

Suddenly he drew down his feet, and leaped from his chair with a startled expression. A face had passed the window, and was the cause of this change of demeanor, though only seen for a brief moment.

"Adeline Ridges!" he cried, as he ran breathlessly to the door.

The face seen was that of a woman, who, to judge by his words, bore that name.

Her back was turned to him, as she walked on down the street.

He spoke the name again, however, as he noted her peculiar carriage and the graceful poise of the head.

"I'd know her in China!" he asserted, darting back for his hat, meaning to follow her. "What is she doing here? I thought she was in San Francisco. By Jove! I'll have a talk with her, or know the reason why!"

He closed the door of the office, but did not lock it, and hurried after her.

She was walking rapidly and was already some distance in advance. There was a jam at a crossing, which delayed him, but she was still in sight when he reached the next pavement.

He hastened on, now, even more rapidly than before, lest she might turn into some side-street or store, and thus be lost to view. Chestnut Burr was growing to be a busy town, and one of considerable dimensions, and such an event was not unlikely.

She did not turn aside or enter a store, but kept straight on toward the upper end of the town.

It was evident she did not know she was being followed; and he overtook her, after a time.

"Is that you, Adeline?" stepping to her side. "By Jove! This is an unexpected pleasure! I thought you were in Frisco. I never in the world expected to see you cruising about here!"

She turned on him with a scared look, and as she did so, revealed the face of the olive-skinned beauty known to the reader as the second Lillie Cushman!

"You are not glad to see me, Adeline!" he said, stretching out his hand to greet her.

She glanced quickly around, before replying.

"We must not be seen talking here!" she asserted. "Where can we go?"

"Up-stairs here, if you like."

She read the sign dangling above their heads. It was that of a law office.

"I am acquainted with the attorney here. He has a consultation room back of his office, and I think we can get the use of it for a few moments' talk, if I ask it."

She withdrew into the opening leading to the stairway, as if anxious to escape observation. She was agitated.

"Yes! Yes! Anywhere! So we're not seen here. I was a fool for coming here to-day, anyway."

"You are not stopping here, then?"

She did not reply, but stepped toward the stairway. Up this he accompanied her; and, after a word with the lawyer, went with her into the well-lighted consultation room.

It would have been plain to the most casual observer that Walter Creston was, or had been, a mad devotee at the feet of this woman whom he called Adeline Ridges. His face and words revealed it beyond question.

"Why did you object to me speaking to you in the street?" he asked, as soon as he had provided her with a chair.

"Because you called me Adeline Ridges."

This brought a stare.

"I'm not Adeline Ridges any more. I am now Lillie Cushman, of near Silver Hill."

He gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Not married, I hope?" in tones that betrayed his excitement and anxiety.

She laughed in his face.

"You always were a silly goose, Walter. No; I'm not married!"

"I was afraid you were, by the change in name."

She laughed again.

"That would destroy all my hopes, you know!" looking at her somewhat sadly. "You remember what I said to you, once upon a time?"

"Some very foolish things, Walter!"

"I said I loved you and wanted you to make me happy by becoming my wife."

"And I told you?"

"That you were not ready to marry any one."

"Which was the truth, then; and it is the truth, now."

"And you quit writing to me," reproachfully, "and when I went to hunt you up, I could find no trace of you."

"Are all men fools, Walter? Are they always pressing women to marry them, when the said women have other plans in mind? There, that 'sail' is a law term, and you ought to like it."

"When will you ever cease your badinage and answer me sensibly?" and a slight frown rested for a moment on his brow.

"If you'd ask an easier question, I might be able to reply to it."

"Then, why do you call yourself Lillie Cushman? I might have known you were not married by the use of that name, Lillie; but my fears outran my reasoning powers. Why are you masquerading?"

"A gentleman who lives near Silver Hill, and of whom you have no doubt often heard, has adopted me into his family. I'm his daughter, now, and at his wish I have taken the name of Lillie Cushman. His name is John Cushman."

"That man?"

"The same. John Cushman, of Silver Hill. I see you have heard of him."

"And never heard anything good of him!"

"That's because you live in Chestnut Burr and not in Silver Hill. Up in Silver Hill they think he's quite an angel. Our views of men depend very much on our point of observation. You've lived long enough to notice that."

"That's very true. But how did it happen that he came to take you into his family as his daughter?"

"Another conundrum! Walter, you're the greatest quiz I ever saw. I believe you'd keep me answering questions all day, if I'd only let you."

"I formed his and his wife's acquaintance, and I presume they took a fancy to me. That's the most reasonable way to account for it. Does it satisfy you?"

"I may call on you, now that I know where you are?" his face beaming with eagerness.

"You can never speak to me again if you address me as Adeline Ridges!"

"Then, I'll be careful on that point. When may I call on you at Cushman's?"

"Not at all!" in most resolute tones.

A look of pain distorted his face.

"It's for the good of both of us, I say it. You would be teasing me constantly over that old love affair, and I should be as constantly hurting your feelings. No, it won't do for you to call on me!"

"May I write to you, then?"

She was for a moment silent and thoughtful.

"Yes; you may write to me occasionally, if you'll make me a promise: You will address me only by the name of Lillie Cushman, and never say anything in the letters to betoken that you know me as anything else."

His eager eyes told her he accepted her terms. "And you will keep still about my past life, and about having met me here to-day. I have

good reasons for not wanting any of these things to become known. You promise?"

"I would promise anything to obtain a ray of hope!" he declared, fervently. "Anything!"

She rewarded him with one of her rarest smiles.

"I always found it safe to rely on you, Walter! I know you will keep your promise."

"Could you not explain to me why you wish to shroud yourself in all this mystery? What is there in the fact that you have been adopted by John Cushman as his daughter to cause all this?"

He was thinking rapidly and his thoughts were not pleasant ones.

He knew Adeline Ridges well; too well, one would say, to lavish on her the whole affection of his heart. Her history—and it was not a savory one—was to him like an open book.

He had become acquainted with her some years before in San Francisco. She moved in good circles, then, and was accounted respectable. It was under such circumstances that he learned to love her with an all-consuming passion—a passion that no later revelations of evil conduct had been able to destroy. He loved her to-day as he had loved her then, in spite of the bitter knowledge that had come to him.

Adeline Ridges had descended from her position of respectability and good repute. On doing so, she had cast him off, telling him she was not worthy of him; and had refused the offer of marriage he had even then made her. For a time she had disappeared, but he had searched her out, notwithstanding the bad reports that were current concerning her. Then she had disappeared again, and he had not been able to trace her; and knew not where she was until he met her in Chestnut Burr.

He was thinking of these things, as he stood there looking at her, waiting for a reply to his questions.

"You must not ask me to explain," she said. "It ought to be sufficient for you to know that I desire to shroud myself in this mystery, as you call it. There is no mystery in it, however; and with that you'll have to be contented."

He was not satisfied, but she would give him no other reply. She wished her real name to remain a secret; and before they separated, she again extracted a promise from him on that point.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### ANOTHER PROMISE OF SECRECY.

WHEN Walter Creston returned to his office, he found Lodestone Lem awaiting him.

Lodestone's first question quite threw him off his balance.

"You are acquainted with Miss Cushman? I saw you talking to her a while ago."

Creston had not been disturbed by seeing Lodestone in his office, thinking Lodestone had come there to inquire about some point of law, or to consult concerning the fight against the Land Pirates.

Adeline Ridges had said nothing to lead him to think Lodestone knew her, or ought of her.

Therefore, he could not resist his start of surprise and the tell-tale flush that mounted to his face.

Lodestone's first supposition on observing this was that Creston did not consider an acquaintanceship with Miss Cushman a matter to be proud of, and was nettled that any friend of his had noticed him talking to her.

"It's all right!" he averred. "I have some acquaintance with the young woman, myself. I didn't think, though, that you knew anything about her; and I came here to beg of you to give me the benefit of your information."

The young attorney cast down his eyes, and did not reply.

"You know her?"

"Yes, I know her."

"And is that all you desire to say?"

"I believe it is, at present."

Lodestone was evidently disappointed.

"I'm sorry you feel compelled to dash my hopes to the ground, Creston! Do you know, I'd give a good deal of money to learn the history of that woman?"

The young lawyer looked searchingly at him.

"Why?"

"It's a long story, and you might not be interested in it."

"I shall be very much interested."

The young attorney had resumed his old seat by the window. Now he got up and lowered the sash, fearing their talk might be heard by some one in the street.

"Do you really want to hear it? Before I go on, then, I want to tell you that I know her name to be Adeline Ridges, and that she came from San Francisco!"

Creston's astonishment betrayed itself.

"You wonder how I know that? The explanation is very simple. I was standing on this corner not far from your office window, wondering whether I ought to go on up-town and see Brennan about that lumber deal, or go down to the newspaper office. And while I was debating the subject, Miss Cushman passed along the street. Then I heard you leap to your feet



and utter the exclamation, 'Adeline Ridges!' And I also heard you say, a moment later, something to the effect that you had last seen her in 'Frisco. That is correct, is it not?"

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I couldn't help overhearing what I did, and as she was the only woman that passed along the street about that time, I knew you referred to her. Naturally, my curiosity was aroused—why, you will see when I get to telling my story!—and when you hurried out of the office, I watched you and saw you join her. Of course, that was all the proof I needed to assure me that Lillie Cushman and Adeline Ridges were one."

He looked earnestly at the young attorney, but the latter made no reply; only keeping his head partly turned aside, and his soft hat drawn well over his eyes.

"Now, I'm going to tell you my story, and I have a strong hope that when you have heard it, you will aid me by imparting such information as you can concerning this woman."

Creston gave him no promise, but sat silently by the window, with his gaze fixed on the floor.

The young attorney feared to hear the revelation that was coming, yet longed to hear it. Lodestone's manner told him it would be of no ordinary character.

Without further preliminary, Lodestone Lem plunged into a detailed account of all he knew about Adeline Ridges; of the supposed murder of Lillie Cushman; and of his recent interview with the woman under discussion, at least so far as that interview related to Lillie Cushman's mysterious disappearance. Nor did he neglect to tell what Sophie Slater had beheld at the newly made grave on that cloudy night.

Creston listened with the stolidity of an image; yet, when he looked up, in answer to one of Lodestone's questions, his face was white and drawn, and he seemed to have aged years in those few brief minutes.

The speaker saw that the young lawyer was suffering intensely, and it awoke his deep pity. He had previously more than half-suspected Creston to be in love with the false-hearted woman, and now he knew it.

"I am sorry, Creston," he declared, "if I have given you pain. It was not my intention. I oughtn't to have plunged into this thing heedlessly, but I was so anxious to learn something concerning her, that I didn't think how you might take it."

"It's all right! Go on!" Creston hoarsely ejaculated.

"But, my dear fellow, it isn't all right. I see I have said too much already."

"I want to hear all of it!"

"You have heard all there is to tell. All the facts in the case, at any rate, and many of the suppositions."

"It's a terrible story!"

Creston looked up again, and Lodestone saw that his eyes were bloodshot and that his lips were trembling.

"And the worst of it is," Creston continued, "I can't force myself to believe it untrue. My God, Lodestone! I wish I could!"

"You needn't believe anything about it," Lodestone hastened to assure him. "Forget what I've been telling you. Rub it out of your mind as you would the useless lumber of an old law case."

"You are suggesting impossibilities. I can never rub that story out of my mind."

Lodestone sat in silent thought, wondering what he ought to do. He was determined to pursue Adeline Ridges to the bitter end, and greatly desired the information he believed the young lawyer to possess. Yet he could not bring himself to ask further questions.

"I presume you mean to cause her arrest for this?" and Creston raised his head again.

"Ultimately, yes! That is what I have contemplated doing. It seems to me to be my plain duty."

"You loved this woman—this Lillie Cushman?" in a subdued voice. "If the case were reversed, I think I should hound down her murderer relentlessly. As it is—I wish I could ask you not to!"

Creston had a stern sense of justice and believed in punishing the violators of law, whoever they might be. He had always advocated that, in public and in private. He could not go back on it, now.

Lodestone Lem was tapping the floor restlessly with his foot.

"You say it ought to be done, Creston. In the name of justice, then, tell me what you know of this woman!"

"I can't!" Creston returned. "I can't tell you anything!"

"Does your knowledge of her tell you that she could be equal to so foul a deed?"

"I can tell you nothing!" and he leaned wearily back against the wall.

"She is Adeline Ridges, of San Francisco?"

The young lawyer was sternerly quiet.

"You do not deny it; and I should know it to be so, from what I heard, even if you did. You feel under obligations not to reveal anything. I respect the feeling. Believe me, I do, and shall not weary you further with inquiries. But, I must ask you to promise one thing. If you promise, I know you will keep your promise!"

"Say nothing to Adeline Ridges of what I have told you. Not a word!"

"It's asking a hard thing."

"I know it is!" Lodestone admitted. "But I feel sure you will keep quiet about it. It's a request made in the interests of justice. You will, will you not?"

It was a long time before Creston answered; and to Lodestone, who was keenly watching him, it was evident a great struggle was going on in his breast.

"I'll say nothing about it!" he finally replied.

"Thank you! That takes a weight off my mind."

"How long is this silence to be maintained?"

"Until I release you from the promise. I'll tell you another thing, under an injunction of secrecy, knowing you are too much of a man to reveal information so imparted. I start for 'Frisco to-night, before she can have time to learn of it, or do anything to balk my work. I think I ought to do this. The blood of the murdered girl calls to me from the ground, urging me to punish her slayers. I feel sure they are John Cushman and this woman you have known as Adeline Ridges."

He again stopped and regarded his silent hearer with closest attention.

"I promise to do nothing rash, Creston. I'll not be in a hurry about anything. I'll proceed with exceeding caution, and feel every foot of the ground firmly under me before taking a step. You can rest sure of that. No one would be better pleased than I to learn that my suspicions are ill-founded. I am judging by the facts as I see them. Even yet, everything is not clear to me, and I may be mistaken in many points. Let us hope I am. But I must make an investigation!"

He got up to go. Creston arose at the same time and extended his hand.

"My best wishes go with you; and I shall never cease to hope that you are on the wrong scent."

Then Lodestone Lem went out into the rush and hurry of the street, feeling strangely solemn, and more than ever inclined to serious thinking.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### IN 'FRISCO.

LODESTONE LEM left on the stage that night for the nearest railway point; and in due season, found himself in San Francisco, the wonderful, bustling metropolis of the Western coast.

His first objective point, after seeking a hotel, was a detective's office.

Over the door of the office which he entered was tacked the inscription, in gilt characters:

"NOE SKELTON,  
Private Detective."

Mr. Skelton was a bushy-browed man, with keen, peering eyes that gave him a peculiarly ferret-like expression. Lodestone Lem was unacquainted with him, except by reputation.

"I have a little work for you to do," said Lodestone, taking the chair offered him, and keenly scrutinizing the ferret-eyed man. "I want a little information looked up."

"I'll furnish it, if I can," Skelton made answer, smiling blandly and pulling at his hawkish nose. "I think I can serve you, as I've had a good deal of experience in such matters. People come to me almost every day on similar errands."

"Did you ever know of a woman in this city named Adeline Ridges?"

"It's quite possible. Indeed, I think I have. I'll have to make an examination first. What—ah—what do you desire to know about her? Anything in the criminal line? Do you suspect her of anything?"

It suddenly occurred to Lodestone that he was to be expected to answer questions, instead of having them answered by the detective, as he desired.

"I know very little about her; but desire to know more. I half-suspect she may have been mixed up in something to get her into the police courts. I feel pretty sure of it, if she lived here very long. If anything of that kind has happened, I want you discover it for me. That's why I'm here."

Skelton got up and took from a bookcase a large volume, resembling in many respects a court record. It was a well-thumbed book, showing it to have been frequently consulted.

Skelton turned to the index and to the letter R.

"Ridges! Ridges!" he muttered, as he ran his eyes over the list of names there recorded.

"Ah! Here it is! Just what we're looking for. Adeline Ridges. Page 164!"

He turned to the page indicated and gave it a careful examination.

"I guess this is the very thing you are looking for. I find here that one, Adeline Ridges, was arrested on the seventh day of January, two years ago, charged with stealing diamonds. The accusing parties were Mr. and Mrs. Stuyvesant Miller, of Nob Hill. My notes show that Adeline Ridges was a young woman, and give also a personal description of her. The charge against her was not sustained. Do you want me to read the description of her appearance?"

"It is not necessary," said Lodestone. "Accused of stealing diamonds, but the charge not sustained?"

"Just so!" and the detective again consulted his book. "I aim to keep a record of all the criminal cases, and frequently find it very useful in my business."

"Were any other charges ever brought against her?"

Skelton made a further examination, then took down another book and looked through its index.

"Only the one case, sir, here in San Francisco. If there had been others, I think they would be noted here. Of course I can't visit all the courts, and sometimes depend on newspapers for the accounts of trials. I and my men generally manage to get everything of importance, however."

"And that's the extent of your information concerning this young woman?" Lodestone inquired.

He evidently had expected to learn more, and was somewhat disappointed.

"There's nothing else that has become a matter of record," Skelton replied, intently studying his questioner's face. "If there's been anything else, though, whether it's a matter of record or not, I think we can run it down. Of course such work is expensive, as it usually consumes a great deal of time."

Lodestone asked what the charge was for the information already furnished, and what would be the expense of a search.

On being informed, he paid the amount already due, and made an advance for the work to be done.

"I shall only be in the city a short time," he said, "but that doesn't matter. Make as thorough a search as you can, and write the result to me at Chestnut Burr. What I am after is the past history of this woman, Adeline Ridges."

He extended to the detective his printed card, bearing the inscription:

"LEMUEL BURTON,

Real Estate Agent,

CHESTNUT BURR, NEVADA.

*Ranches and Mining Lands a Specialty.*"

The detective glanced at it, made a memorandum in a little note-book, and thrust the card into the pigeon-hole of a desk. Then he looked at Lodestone again, with that keen, penetrating glance. Lodestone had not vouchsafed any reason for desiring this information, and Skelton's curiosity was piqued.

"I believe that is all," and the caller arose to go. "Perhaps I'll drop in again before I leave town."

On leaving the detective's office, Lodestone returned to his hotel, where he remained much of the time throughout the day.

After nightfall he sallied out into the streets, where the cavernous spaces between the tall houses were illuminated by the glare of electric lights. The cool wind which had blown strongly through the Golden Gate during the day, had almost wholly died away, and a mist was beginning to be perceptible.

Lodestone bent his steps toward the bay; but instead of continuing on in that direction, turned finally into a side street that led to a portion of the city beyond Chinatown, where the houses were mostly tumble-down structures, and the evidences of poverty abundant.

Before one of those uninviting houses he stopped; and, after looking at the number, approached the door and rapped loudly.

He was forced to repeat the raps before there came any stir from within. Then a light gleamed from one of the windows, the door was opened, and a man appeared, bearing a lamp.

When he saw Lodestone, he admitted him without question, and then closed the door.

He was a thin man, with a pale face and stooping shoulders. He was rather above the medium height, and had once been prepossessing in appearance.

"I have been looking for you," he said quietly, as he shuffled in advance along the hallway, still carrying the lamp. "I got your letter this morning, and so knew you were in town."

He led Lodestone into a room where a coal fire was burning in a stove, for the chill and dampness of the night were already beginning to make themselves felt. It was not a sumptuously-furnished apartment, but cozy enough, and bright-looking with the red firelight flickering over it.

The man seemed to warm, under the glow of the genial blaze, and smiled at Lodestone, and even chatted pleasantly, as he took the latter's hat and coat and got out a chair for him.

"I'm glad to see you, Lem!" he said. "Heaven knows, I see few enough people these days, and it's a terribly poky old place to live in!"

"You don't stay here all the time?" Lodestone questioned, glancing about the room and fixing his eyes finally on the few books that swung on a hanging bookshelf.

"Not all the time, of course, I couldn't do that, you know. But I stay here a good deal. I take a run about the streets occasionally. What's the news down at Chestnut Burr? You're whooping things there, you tell me."



Lodestone's eyes kindled at the recollection. He always liked to sing the praises of Chestnut Burr, and was nothing loth to plunge into a recital of its present glory and future possibilities.

"I believe you ought to change your place of residence again," he said, finally, dropping Chestnut Burr and looking at the thin-faced man before him. "This isn't a healthy place, anyhow. The house is too damp."

"It suits me very well. But I'll make the change if you say so."

"I believe I should. I've some enemies down at Chestnut Burr, the ones I wrote you about—and they'd be likely to give a good deal to be able to find you. I'll try and look up a better place for you before I leave the city."

The conversation wandered again, touching on many points not material to this story.

Finally Lodestone arose to go; and, as he did so, he drew out his purse and took from it several gold pieces. These he gave to the man.

The latter accompanied him to the front door, and warmly shook hands with him before turning back into the house with the lamp.

Lodestone retraced his way to one of the principal streets, where he hailed a cab and was driven toward the bay.

After dismissing the cab he approached a deserted house near the water-side. The damp fog had increased in chilliness as well as density, and Lodestone shivered as he walked about the house and looked up at its decaying timbers.

There seemed to be some bitter memories connected with this place.

He drew near the front door and peered through the gathering mist at the almost illegible sign above it:

"SAILORS' BOARDING-HOUSE."

"John Colby, Proprietor."

This was what he read, and the sight of it seemed to give him an uncomfortable feeling.

He did not tarry long before the house, and went nearer the shore of the bay, where he wandered a long time. Then he turned back toward the city.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE TRAMP AND THE DETECTIVE.

LODESTONE LEM had no sooner left the office of Noe Skelton, the detective, than the tramp, Barnum Yates, made his appearance in the just vacated corridor. He followed Lodestone to the street, and seeing him turn in the direction of the hotel, reclinced the stairway and knocked at the detective's door.

Adeline Ridges had not been satisfied that her former lover, Walter Creston, would be entirely true to his promise, and her uneasiness became great when she saw him re-enter his office and engage in conversation with Lodestone Lem.

On separating from Creston she crossed to the opposite side of the street, pulled a veil over her face, and retraced her way toward the other end of the town. Before meeting Creston she had fancied she was being watched by Lodestone, having seen him look at her sharply as she passed the street-corner near young Creston's office. She believed that if Lodestone had seen her conversing with Creston, he would be certain to question the young attorney; and that was the principal reason which made her exact the promise.

As she hurried on down the opposite side of the street, she could look straight into Creston's office, for this was before Lodestone closed the window; and when she saw him talking to Lodestone, she felt sure the latter was trying to "pump" the young attorney.

There was no way by which she could learn what was taking place in that office, so, impelled by her worst fears, she went in search of Barnum Yates.

She had seen Yates since entering Chestnut Burr, and knew that the tramp was stopping at a low eating-house, where food and lodging were of the very cheapest. Thither she went.

Yates was sitting lazily on the sidewalk, in the shadow of the building, tipped back in a rickety chair, and extracting comfort from a foul-smelling pipe.

"Follow me!" she whispered, as she passed him. "I've something I want to say to you."

The tramp recognized her in spite of her veil, and winked knowingly.

"Mum's the word, eh?" getting on his feet and knocking the ashes from his pipe. "K'rect ye air! I'll be there!"

He stowed the hot pipe in one of his pockets, watched her until she was some distance in advance, and then shambled along in her wake.

She did not turn her head to see that he was obeying, but went straight to a hotel and asked the clerk if she could hire the parlor for a few moments, as she wanted to consult with a gentleman who would be there presently.

He required her to register, charged her a small fee, and then showed her the room. She had put down the name, "Lillie Cushman, Silver Hill."

"Hanged if old John Cushman hadn't better look out fer his daughter!" was his mental comment, when the tramp appeared and, after inquiry, wended his way to the parlor.

Adeline Ridges knew her course of action would subject her to unpleasant talk, in all probability; but she was determined to have an interview with the tramp in spite of that.

"You know Walter Creston, and of course you know Lodestone Lem? The two are now in Creston's office, and I think their talk concerns me. It's likely, if it does, that Lodestone will soon make a visit to San Francisco. Should he do that, I want you to follow him there and if possible learn the nature of his mission. Are you at work, now?"

Yates answered in the negative.

He was sizing up this young woman, thinking of the possible pay he would receive, and wondering how high it would be safe to fix his charges. He remembered she claimed to have paid him all her money when she gave him the two hundred dollars.

"Hain't likely to git no work, neither," he sulkily added. "Sellin' out to you that time was the wust thing I ever done. I lost my job by it, an' all chance o' gittin' another hundred out of Lodestone. If I do anything more for ye, you'll hev to stack up the dust."

His manner irritated her, as it always did.

"I'll pay you, never fear. I gave you all the money I had, then!"

"An' went an' blowed to Lodestone what I tol' ye! Now, I ask ye if that's jist the way to treat a cove?"

She did not reply to this pointed question. She felt humiliated in the presence of this creature; yet, if she would accomplish her purposes, she was still forced to use him as a tool.

"I'll pay you," she repeated, "and pay you well. I want you to keep a watch on Lodestone Lem. You mustn't let him out of your sight; and if he goes to San Francisco, you must follow him. Do you understand? Follow him and find out all he does there. Every thing!"

Barnum Yates could not have been pleased better than to be given the task of trailing Lodestone Lem to San Francisco. The witness, Ezra Tanner, lived in that city, and he felt sure if Lodestone paid the place a visit, he would call on Tanner. Yates did not know where the witness was, now, but in all probability, Tanner could be re-located by a close hounding of Lodestone's footsteps.

He did not say any of this to Adeline Ridges, though his thoughts were full of it.

"I'll pay you five dollars a day and your expenses for all the time consumed, if you have to go to 'Frisco!" and she took out her purse. "There's twenty dollars."

Yates asserted it was not half enough, and she gave him another double-eagle.

"I'll pay you in full, when you return, if you tell a straight and truthful story. Mind, I want to know what Lodestone does there! Where he goes, who he talks to, and all about it!"

"K'rect!" and he dropped the coins into his pocket. "I'm yer mutton fer any biz o' that kind! When I git back, you'll think I'm a newspaper reporter."

"You're to go to work at once—this minute!" as she turned toward the door. "Remember that. And remember, too, that you're not to leave this house until I've had a chance to get away from it."

"Proud o' my company, eh?" and he winked after her, as she glided through the doorway. "I 'most knowed you would be. Barnum Yates Esquire, linyul descendant o' the great showman! Blue blood! Yum! Yum!"

He took out the coins, tossed them into the air, and caught them gleefully.

"If this keeps up, it'll be a gold mine. Better'n stickin' type! I should smile!"

He tried to cut a pigeon-wing, but failed; and then satisfied that Adeline had gained the street, let himself softly out of the room, and followed her.

Once on the thoroughfare, he turned in the direction of Creston's office.

On gaining its vicinity, he became assured that Lodestone and Creston were still within the office engaged in conversation, and he made his way to the rear of the building for the purpose of obtaining a position where he could hear what was being said.

As has been indicated, the office was on the ground floor. It was a small building, and the room in the rear of the office was given up to various kinds of useless lumber. The door of this rear room Yates succeeded in opening; and so got to where he could distinguish the words of the conversation.

The conference was almost at an end, and Lodestone was nearly on the point of taking his leave. But the tramp heard enough to show him that Lodestone meant to leave that night for San Francisco.

Yates retreated when he heard Lodestone get up to go; and, after locking the rear door behind him, made his way unobserved from the vicinity of the office by means of a back alley.

"'Frisco, it is!" he muttered, as he strode thoughtfully along. "'Frisco and Ezra Tanner; and then more double-eagles, and likely a hundred or two!"

He was in great good-humor over what he considered this new windfall of fortune.

His first act was to proceed to a cheap cloth-

ing-house, and invest in a suit of fairly respectable looking clothes. Then he returned to his boarding-house, and got ready for the expected journey.

He did not take the stage, as Lodestone did, for that would have been to reveal himself to the man he was shadowing. Instead, he hired a pony and set out in the middle of the afternoon for the railway station, thus going in advance. It was the best plan, he argued, for the next stage, after Lodestone's, would not pass over the route until the ensuing day; and by reaching the station ahead of Lodestone, he would be there ready to watch him and take advantage of any favoring circumstances.

The pony was left with a stable-keeper at the station, as had been agreed; and the tramp put in a portion of the time before the coming of the stage by making sundry changes in his general appearance. The new suit was something of a disguise, but a barber further altered his looks by removing his heavy beard and trimming his hair; and Yates still improved on this by donning a pair of green sun-goggles.

He surveyed himself in a mirror when all this had been done, and was satisfied his most intimate acquaintance in Chestnut Burr would fail to recognize him.

He saw the Chestnut Burr stage come in, and Lodestone Lem alight from it. This was during the night, and not far from the time of the arrival of the 'Frisco train.

From that moment, he carefully shadowed Lodestone until the train came in, and he saw him take a seat in one of the coaches.

Yates had already purchased a ticket, and relying on the completeness of his disguise, boldly entered the same coach, taking a seat near the door, so located he would have his enemy constantly under his eye.

And so it came about that when Lodestone reached the great city, the tramp was close at his heels; and when he called on the detective, Noe Skelton, Yates was still trailing him and saw him enter the detective's office.

Yates slipped into the corridor and tried to hear what was passing between the detective and Lodestone, but in this he failed.

When Lodestone left the office, and Yates had assured himself that he intended to return to the hotel, Yates turned back, as has been said, toward Skelton's room.

His knock on the door brought the detective to open it, and Yates glided in and took the chair which Lodestone had just vacated.

"In the detective biz, eh?" squinting at Skelton and looking curiously about the room. "Never was in a detective shop before."

Skelton was evidently not greatly impressed with the importance or money value of his present visitor. Being used to sizing-up all sorts and conditions of men, it did not take him long to accurately gauge the tramp.

"Do you know the chap that jist left hyer?" Yates asked.

Not thinking well of this caller, Skelton thought it wise to exact the fee in advance.

"My charge for imparting information is five dollars," he said.

Yates reluctantly fished the money out of his pocket and gave it to him, thinking grimly at the same time that Miss Cushman would have to come down heavily for the expenses of this trip.

"I don't know him!" Skelton made answer, as he pocketed the fee.

"But reebbe you can tell me somethin' about him? His name is Lem Burton, an' he lives at Chestnut Burr. He was one't arrested hyer in 'Frisco, charged with murderin' an' robbin' a sailor named John Colby. Likely you know somethin' about that?"

"Do you want me to look into the case?"

Skelton did not consider that it would be doing wrong to search out Lodestone's record for the tramp, even as he was to search Adeline Ridges's record for Lodestone. It was in the line of his business.

"K'rect ye air! That's what I want! An' I specially want to know about this John Colby case."

Skelton got down his well-thumbed book once more, and again sought for the letter B in the index.

"Burton! Burton! Here you are!"

He scratched his head, reflectively, and again ran over the index; then turned to the page indicated.

"This is a little strange!" talking to himself rather than to the tramp. "I find a Burton here, charged with the murder of John Colby, a seaman. But it is Silas Burton instead of Lemuel."

He looked questioningly at the tramp.

"Are you sure this is your man?"

"I reckon it must be, if it says John Colby."

Skelton was reading the account of the trial contained in a newspaper clipping pasted in the book.

"I guess you are correct, after all," looking up again. "This man was arrested under the name of Silas Burton, and was released because he proved himself to be another person."

"Changed his name, eh?" the tramp muttered under his breath. "An' brought followers forward to swear it had never been anything else. That's an old dodge. I've changed my name."



more'n onc't, an' am liable to do it ag'in before to-morry! An' they let 'im loose because they thought he wasn't the feller they was a-lookin' fer?" this aloud to Skelton.

"So it seems, from the newspaper account. They couldn't fasten the thing against him, and they had to let him go."

He closed the book and returned it to its place.

"An' that's all there is o' the Colby matter?"

"Yes; so far as my records go."

"Obleeged to ye," and the tramp arose, not desiring to remain too long away from the hotel where Lodestone was stopping. "I'll 'vestigate this thing a little on my own account, an' mebbe I'll drop in ag'in on ye."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### SHADOWED.

RELYING on the security of his disguise, Barnum Yates entered the office of the hotel, registered in a false name, and was assigned to a room on the same floor with that occupied by Lodestone Lem.

They even sat at dinner in the same dining-room that day, though not at the same table, and Lodestone still remained in ignorance of the tramp's presence.

Throughout the day Yates hung persistently at Lodestone's heels. If Lodestone went into the reading room, he was pretty sure to see the blue-goggled man glancing over the morning papers. If he strolled into the billiard room, there again was the same figure. And so it was, wherever he went. That the man in blue-goggles had recently been shaved was very apparent to even the most casual observer, for his chin and cheeks had a whity, bluish cast in marked contrast to the general sallowness of the upper part of his face. But there was nothing in that to excite Lodestone's suspicion. In fact, Lodestone thought nothing about the stranger, and scarcely looked straight at him twice that day.

When Lodestone left the hotel after nightfall, he was closely followed by the tramp.

Yates was not far away when the Chestnut Burr champion knocked on the door of the dilapidated house and was admitted by the thin-faced man who bore the lamp.

From his post of observation Yates could determine by the light of the lamp what room the two had entered; and vaulting over the rickety fence, he hastened around to the window of that room.

Standing out of sight in the gloom, he could see the two men engaged in conversation; and by laying an ear close to the window-sill, could hear some of the words said.

The scraps of conversation that reached him were only fragmentary, but they were sufficient to greatly excite him. He had not a doubt that the thin-faced man was the concealed witness, Ezra Tanner. He was sure of it, when he heard Lodestone urge him to change his place of abode; and especially so, when he saw Lodestone pay him money.

"I've got the boss foul, now!" he thought; and he seemed to be hugging himself rapturously as he drew up his arms to better protect his chest from the chilliness of the raw fog. "You bet, I've got 'im! An' I'll tighten up the screws this time till he squeals! When this thin-faced jay-bird changes his cage ag'in, I'll know all about it an' where he goes to!"

When Lodestone left the house, and was driven away in the cab, Yates leaped into another cab and directed the driver to follow the one in advance, but to keep far enough in the rear to prevent discovery.

The tramp felt that he had learned so much that he could not afford to lose what chances there might be of learning more; and was doggedly determined to pursue Lodestone all night, and to every part of the city, should it become necessary.

When he saw Lodestone dismiss his cab, he followed the example thus unintentionally set. Lodestone had alighted near a lamp, which rendered his movements visible, even in the thickening fog; while the cab of the tramp, further back in the darkness, was not so readily discernible to the shadowed man.

If Lodestone had dreamed of espionage, he could easily have taken measures to prevent it, but being so entirely unconscious of it, he made no special effort to conceal his movements.

Yates was close at his heels again, as he moved toward the bar—the tramp writhing and creeping along, like some monster born of the ocean mist.

Yates again chuckled delightedly, as he read the name of John Colby on the sign of the old hotel, which he did but a minute or two after Lodestone Lem had looked at the same words.

The fog was growing thicker, and because of this, Yates did not see Lodestone when the latter turned back to the city. He was not conscious of Lodestone's near presence until Lodestone was almost upon him, and then it was too late to run.

The tramp had been crouching behind a board pile near a warehouse, straining his eyes through the gloom in the direction of the bay.

Lodestone saw him, as he leaped to his feet and attempted to rush round a corner of the

building. A quick distrust filled his mind. Whose was this shadow? and why should it endeavor to flit away in that manner? He felt he had been followed and spied on.

His anger was aroused and he sprung in rapid chase. He might not have overtaken the tramp, if the latter had not stumbled and fallen sprawling as he tried to turn the corner. Before the tramp could rise, Lodestone had him grasped by the collar.

Yates tried to wriggle away, but Lodestone held him firmly and half lifted him to his feet.

"Who are you?" was his demand. "You have been spying on me!"

Yates whined out a denial, in a changed voice, and begged to be let go.

Lodestone was inexorable. He believed the man had been shadowing him, and was resolved to learn who he was.

A street lamp not far away was making an almost vain fight against the heavy fog, and toward this lamp he dragged his squirming prisoner.

Yates struggled with all his might, fearful of the result of a detection.

"Come along!" Lodestone angrily roared. "I'm going to have a look at your face, if I have to first knock you down and carry you over there!"

Yates grew desperate; and getting out a knife, struck savagely at his captor.

"You let me go, will you!" he growled.

"Let me go, or I'll slash ye!"

His excitement was so intense that he almost dropped the disguising twist to his voice.

Lodestone grasped the knife-hand, at the same time giving a start of surprise, and attempted to peer into the face beneath his own.

"I believe you are Barnum Yates!" he declared, with a flaming of fiercer wrath.

"You lemme go!" the wretch bellowed, striving to jerk away. "You lemme go, or it'll be the wuss fer ye!"

In spite of his protests and threats, Lodestone held tightly to the hand, and slowly dragged him forward until the light was gained. Then, by an effort he forced the tramp's shaven face upward toward the light.

But he did not get to view the tramp's changed features. He had released his grasp on the tramp's hand. This Yates was quick to take advantage of. He struck Lodestone a lunging blow with his head that knocked him backward; and thus completely freed, the tramp scudded away at the top of his speed.

Lodestone picked himself up ruefully and stared at the vanishing figure.

"I believe that was Barnum Yates!" he panted. "Yet, it seems hardly possible. At any rate, it was the blue-goggled man I saw at the hotel. Can he have been Yates?"

The scudding figure had disappeared in the all-enveloping fog; and Lodestone Lem turned back toward the city. The incident made him uneasy and filled him with ill-defined fears. If the man was really Yates and had been spying on him, then there was much cause for anxiety.

In this mood Lodestone hailed the first cab he came to, and was driven once more to the shabby street where he had had the conference with the thin-faced individual already mentioned.

The man had retired, and it required much thumping and pounding on the door to arouse him. He was startled as well as surprised when he saw the annoyed and anxious look worn by Lodestone.

"I have been followed!" Lodestone whispered, stepping into the hallway and speaking very earnestly. "I have been spied on all night by that tramp, Barnum Yates. I am satisfied he is trying to locate you. Pack up your things and get out of here before daybreak, if you can. You can go to a cheap hotel in some quiet quarter; and then take time to look up a house or a room."

The man was as much agitated, apparently, as was Lodestone; and, when the latter had ceased speaking, glanced about in a helpless way.

"I don't know where to go!" he declared.

"Anywhere!" Lodestone urged. "Just so you make a change! We must throw that tramp off the scent!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A STORMY SCENE.

"How did the tramp know I was coming to 'Frisco?" Lodestone Lem questioned of himself, as he moved on toward his hotel, after extracting from the thin-faced man the promise desired.

A sudden flash of light came to him, as his mind reverted to Adeline Ridges. He recalled the fact that she had seen him standing on the corner; and then, by patching scanty threads together, he almost succeeded in convincing himself that she was the moving spirit in this pursuit.

He could not yet state positively that the man he had captured near the bay was Barnum Yates; and still he felt sure of it; as sure as a man can be of anything of that character.

He determined to watch for the blue-goggled man and learn the truth. The man was registered at the same hotel, had a room there, and possibly some things he might not desire to leave. Would he not return for these things?

Lodestone was so feverishly impatient that he hailed another cab and was driven at a furious pace to the hotel.

His first act on arriving there was to examine the hotel register. He knew the number of the room which had been occupied by the supposed tramp; and investigation revealed that the man who had been assigned that room had set down his name as James Gardner, and his address as Los Angeles.

There was something strangely familiar in the cramped and crabbed handwriting. It did not seem to be the handwriting of Barnum Yates, and yet was suggestive of it.

Lodestone studied it a long while, keeping one eye on the door of the room as he did so, that he might observe the blue-goggled man, should he enter.

"I believe it's Yates!" was his final positive assertion. "I mean to find out, at any rate!"

He was worn out and needed sleep; but a liberal fee given to the night clerk transformed that individual into a vigilant sentinel; and Lodestone retired, confident that if the blue-goggled man returned, he would be immediately notified of the fact.

The man of the blue goggles did not return to the hotel that night; and the next morning Lodestone installed himself in the hotel office, and divided his time between watching the door and watching the room-keys that hung on a rack behind the clerk.

The forenoon was almost half gone when a boy of twelve or fourteen entered the office, and approaching the clerk, whispered to him in a low tone. A short conversation ensued, which was not understood by the watcher; then, some money was paid, and the clerk passed to the boy the key to room twenty-one.

That was the room the blue-goggled man had occupied; and when Lodestone saw the key come down from its hook, he got up to follow the boy.

"My man has sent for his valise," he thought; having learned from the night clerk that the blue-goggled man had left such a piece of luggage in his room.

The boy was instructed by the clerk how to find room twenty-one; and as he went in search of it, Lodestone walked after him.

As the boy came out of the room with the valise, Lodestone held up a five-dollar gold coin.

"I'll give you this, if you'll answer a few questions and let me carry that valise for you."

Five dollars was a big temptation to the boy, and his eyes glittered as he looked at the money.

"What did the blue-spectacled man say to you when he sent for this?"

"'Twa'n't no blue-spectacled man as sent me."

"Oh, it wa'n't! What sort of a looking man was he?"

"A clean-shaved feller, with a wart on the side of his face."

The fact that the unknown had taken pains to have his mustache shaved off and to still further disguise himself, was, to Lodestone's mind, almost convincing proof that he was Barnum Yates.

"Well, I'll give you this five dollars, if you'll tell me where he's stopping, and let me carry the valise to him."

"Done!" said the boy. "I owe him one, anyhow. It's wuth a quarter to carry that valise from this hotel to whur he's stayin', an' he screwed me down to ten cents!"

"You'll find me a different kind of paymaster!" and Lodestone again held up the shining coin. "Where will I find him?"

The boy gave the street and number, together with the number of the room.

Lodestone knew the place well. It was a cheap boarding-house not far from the street that contained the tumble-down buildings.

"Here's your money," and he reached out his hand for the valise, at the same time giving the boy the coin.

He did not choose to walk the distance, and so sought the assistance of another cab; which brought him in a very short time to the vicinity of the house where Yates was lying low in his new disguise.

When Lodestone tapped softly on the door of the tramp's room, Yates got up and opened it, naturally thinking his caller was the boy with the valise.

He fell back in a panic, when he saw who his visitor really was and beheld the valise in his hand.

"Here's your baggage! I consented to bring it down to you!" and Lodestone very deliberately walked into the room.

The tramp retreated to the chair from which he had arisen, and sunk frightenedly into it.

He was greatly changed in appearance, and would scarcely have been recognized as the blue-goggled gentleman of the day before. All of his beard had been removed, and the disfiguring wart on one cheek quite altered the expression of his countenance.

"My dear Yates, I'm really glad to see you! You'd believe it, I know, could you but understand the trouble I've been to to get the privilege!"

Yates stared as if he did not comprehend.

"I reckon there's some mistake hyer!" he asserted, in his altered tones, weakly endeavoring



to brazen the thing out. "You're mistaken, if you think my name's Yates."

"Well, I never did believe that was really your name, though you've gone by it ever since I've known you. I presume Chestnut Burr is booming along in the same old way! You must have left there after I did!"

"Hanged if I know what you're a-talkin' about!" Yates stoutly declared.

"Come! Come!" and Lodestone dropped his bantering tones. "A little nonsense now and then is relished by the best of men, but only a fool likes it all the time. You ought to know that I'm not quite a fool."

The tramp still attempted to stare bewilderedly.

"I know you, Barnum Yates, and you ought to see that I know you! Perhaps this will vivify your recollection. It will recall last night, anyway!"

He had slipped out his revolver before Yates knew what he meant to do, and now covered the disguised tramp with it.

"I've tracked you down, and I propose to have some satisfaction before we separate again. You wriggled out of my clutches last night, but you'll not be able to do it so easy this time."

Yates looked at the door, which he could not reach because of Lodestone; and then glanced at the window as if he had dim thoughts of hurling himself out of it.

"You're a crazy man or a burglar, an' I'm a-goin' to yell fer the police."

He opened his mouth to emit the cry, but the words were never given birth. The ominous clicking of the revolver choked their utterance; and he sat there with his mouth open, as if frozen or petrified, and filled with a horrible fear.

"I reckon you'd better not try to call for the police!" and Lodestone's words were cold and measured. "You'd better act sensible and own up that you're Barnum Yates, and answer a few questions I've got ready for you."

Yates shrunk into the depths of his chair, as if he would hide himself there.

"Are you Barnum Yates?"

"Hel—"

The intended call for help died away in a low gurgle, as he saw Lodestone's flashing eye glance straight at him over the deadly tube.

"You'd better think twice before trying that one! Now, speak up! Quick! You are Barnum Yates?"

Lodestone Lem had no notion of shooting the tramp, but believed he could best accomplish his purposes by a stiff game of bluff.

The tramp's teeth shook until they rattled.

"The sticky fog of last night must be still hanging with you, Barnum! It was very penetrating."

"Can't you let up on a feller?" Yates pleaded. "I tell ye I'm not yer man!"

"Let's confess at once that that's a very good joke, Yates! But please don't run it in the ground. Its repetition gets monotonous."

"What is it you want o' me?"

"In the first place, you are Barnum Yates?"

The tramp squirmed and writhed under the threatening weapon, and Lodestone's equally threatening looks.

"Own up to it! And then we'll proceed to consider other things."

Yates gasped and gurgled evasively.

"Out with it! You're Yates?"

"What if I am?"

"All right; if you want to answer it in that way. I don't know that a confession of that fact amounts to much, for I already know who you are."

"Lemme go!" Yates coaxed. "If you'll lemme go, I'll—"

"You're not to be trusted, Yates. I'd be a fool to believe anything you'd promise."

"Oh, lemme go! Please, lemme go!"

"You'll answer my questions, and in short order, or you'll get the contents of this! You've annoyed me enough; and I warn you, I sha'n't stand any further nonsense. Why have you been bounding me?"

Yates would have denied that he had been, had not the evidence been so complete.

"You followed me to Frisco. You watched me all day yesterday at the hotel, and you shadowed me last night. Why did you do it? I think I know, but I want you to say why you did."

"I—I—"

Yates was shivering so that he could hardly speak.

"Quick, now! Speak up! Why did you do these things?"

Yates quailed and writhed, but Lodestone was inexorable.

"Why did you follow me?"

"Miss Cushman tol' me tol'" the tramp chatteringly confessed.

"Ah! Miss Cushman sent you? I half-suspected as much. And why did she send you?"

He was still pointing the menacing revolver. Yates dropped to his knees and lifted his hands, prayerfully.

"I'll tell everything!" he affirmed. "Everything! Only let up on a feller. Take away that gun!"

"Why did she send you?" the questioner relentlessly thundered. "What did she tell you to do?"

There seemed no escape for the tramp, and he made a clean breast.

"I ought to shoot you, Yates; and I may, yet, if you tempt me too much. If you're wise, you will never show your head in Chestnut Burr; and you'll leave this city at once."

"I'll do anything, boss!"

Yates felt that he was in a trap, and in consequence became glib in his promises.

"Never show your face in Chestnut Burr again, then! If you do, I'll make it hot for you. And you must get out of this town at once."

"Yes, boss! I will, boss! Thank ye, boss!"

This last as the revolver was lowered.

Lodestone kicked the valise toward him.

"There's your baggage! Take it and get out of here! And remember that I shall be watching you to see that you go."

He backed through the doorway, and after delivering this parting shot, left the shivering tramp alone with his fears.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### FRISCO'S STRANGE REPORT.

LODESTONE LEM could scarcely return to business affairs with his return to Chestnut Burr. He wanted to think, and the noise and bustle and aggressiveness of the boom he had helped to inaugurate were irritating.

One of his first callers was Creston, the attorney. The young lawyer was naturally anxious to learn what had been developed by the Frisco visit. Lodestone gave him a truthful account of all that had occurred.

When he thought of it, and he thought of it almost constantly, Lodestone was made painfully aware of the fact that the Frisco journey was barren of important results. He could not use the knowledge of the diamond robbery, and that was practically all he had learned of the woman's life in the great city. The detective was, however, trying to look up her record, and something might yet come of that.

Creston was manifestly pleased with the barrenness of the trip, and when he had heard all Lodestone had to tell, he took his departure.

Lodestone had another caller the next day. This was Frisco Ben, who, having heard of Lodestone's return, came over to consult with him.

Frisco had a remarkable story to tell.

"I've been a-watchin' that there Miss Cushman like a hen-hawk watches a sparrer, ever sence you've been gone, jist as you told me to," he said, after having listened intently to Lodestone's account of his own recent experiences.

"You have made a discovery?" looking anxiously at him.

"That's jist it! I think I have, an' sometimes I think I hain't. Lately I've been thinkin' I hain't, more than I have; an' Sophie, she agrees with me!"

He twisted uneasily and scratched his head, as if anxious to dig out the ore of new ideas.

"I reckon, now, you wouldn't say 'twas anything uncommon to hear kyotes a-hollerin' in the hills?"

"I should say it is a very common circumstance."

"That's what throws me. It's too blamed common to think about! The critters is alays a-ki-yi-in', an' a-kee-yee-in', an' a-whistlin', an' sich! They're wuss fer sairenadin' than a country brass band!"

All this was pointless to Lodestone, though he could see that Frisco was struggling hard to get at the subject he wished to broach.

"And these serenading coyotes made you think of what?"

"They didn't make me think o' nothin'. 'Twas another circumstance that did that. Er, ruther, the circumstance set Sophie—"

He scratched his head again.

"Ye see, it was this way. Sophie noticed that the howlin' of the kyotes, when it come from a certain direction an' was extry lively, made Miss Cushman as nervous as a stray cat. She'd go to the winder—Miss Cushman, not Sophie—an' she'd look out to'rst the hills, an' she'd press her fingers this way against her head; an' she'd shiver this way, whenever the critters yelped extry loud."

Frisco Ben pressed his hands to his forehead, and tried to tie his spine into bow-knots, in a vain effort to imitate the shivers which Sophie had witnessed.

"Sophie thought at first that all this meant somethin', an' when she come an' tol' me about it, I thought so, too. Of course, we thought o' the body that Giffillan carried away."

A spasm of pain crossed Lodestone's face.

"Go on!" he requested, as Frisco stopped short in his narration.

"Well, me an' Sophie set ourselves to do some clost watchin' of Miss Cushman. We didn't learn nothin' the fust night, er the second; but on the third night, after the kyotes had been yellin' in an uncommon fashion, she slipped out o' the house and went in the direction o' the noise."

"I follered clost after her—as clost as I could without danger o' discovery. It made me feel creepy to be wigglin' along that way after her,

an' her goin' straight out into the hill country in the black night."

"Most women would 'a' been afraid o' the kyotes. You couldn't 'a' hired Sophie to go there fer a gold mine! I do b'lieve she'd keel over in a dead faint if one should brush by her in the dark. Cur'us how women do differ, hain't it?"

Lodestone was waiting impatiently, and with set teeth for the denouement.

"I kep' clost to her until she got a considerable distance into the hills, an' then I lost her fer a bit. I crep' around a good while a-tryin' to pick up her trail, an' couldn't do it; an' then, all at onc't, I see her a-comin' back. She was purty clost onto me, too, before I knowed it; an' so I flattened down behind a big rock, fer there wasn't any other way fer me to do, an' waited fer her to pass."

"She looked like a black shadder, as she slipped by me, and she was a-talkin' to herself."

Lodestone bent eagerly forward.

"She was a-talkin' to herself; an' I heard her say: 'Thank Heaven! It's safe, yit!'"

"Now, whatever she meant by that, I don't know; though I had an idear. Of course, I thought at onc't o' the body; an' I figured out, as me an' Sophie had done before, that she was afeard it had been dug up by the kyotes."

"That was all you heard?" was Lodestone's hoarse question.

"I heard more, but that's all I understood. She was jist a-chatterin' to herself, as she went by me; but she was a-talkin' low, an' walkin' like a streak, an' the wind—"

"It must have referred to the body!" Lodestone interrupted.

"That's what we figured, at first."

"What made you change your minds about it?"

"She went out ag'in the next night, an' onc't more I follered her. She took the same direction; and she walked so fast that I lost her ag'in. I cal'lated she'd return by the same way, an' so I laid fer her; an' when she come back she was a-talkin' onc't more."

"But this time, she was a-mumblin' somethin' about gold—gold mines or gold dollars, I couldn't rightly make out which."

"An' on account o' what I heard that last time, me an' Sophie thought mebbe she'd made a find out there; an' that her trips didn't have anything to do with the body."

"And that's the extent of your discoveries?"

"About all. I've hunted them hills in every direction around the spot where I seen her disappear, an' I can't find nothin'. I've listened time an' ag'in to the kyotes, thinkin' to git an idear from that, but 'twasn't no use."

"I think there's something in your discovery," Lodestone declared, after mature reflection. "Judging from what you have told me, I am inclined to believe Miss Cushman is suffering from guilty fears, and that these drove her into the hills—the coyotes being the exciting cause. If you continue your watching, you may learn something of importance, yet."

"I've already been reckonin' I'd do that! An' Sophie, she keeps a weather eye open whenever I'm away."

"Make another search of the hills, and continue to watch Miss Cushman; and notify me promptly of all you see and hear."

And with these in-tructions impressed firmly on his mind, Frisco Ben again left Chestnut Burr.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE RESULT OF FRISCO'S VIGILANCE.

THE first result of Frisco's continued vigilance was the overhearing of a conversation between John Cushman and the dark-skinned beauty.

Frisco was lying in wait in the shadow of a low-growing bush, near the side entrance from which Miss Cushman usually issued when making her nocturnal visits to the hills.

He heard her descend the stairway into the corridor and move along it toward the door, and he shrunk further back into the shadow for better concealment. He expected her to come out of the house at once, but she did not.

Instead, he heard John Cushman's voice, and a low, indistinguishable talk.

The two emerged together and stood on the low steps, where they continued the conversation begun in the corridor.

"I've been wanting to see you all day," was Miss Cushman's nervous statement. "The coyotes have been howling incessantly for several nights past, and last night I went out and made a horrible discovery. They had been digging into the grave, and I'm afraid they'll unearth the body."

She drew closer to Cushman, and even in the gloom—which was heaviest in the shadow of the house—Frisco Ben could see her shiver in the manner described by Sophie Slater.

Cushman put an arm about her as if to still her fears.

"Perhaps I'd better go down there and make an examination," he said.

She clasped her hands, imploringly.

"If you only will! That is what I was going to request."

"There might trouble come from it! Yes; I'll go down. I'll do it, if only to keep you from running out there and tramping over the hills



the way you have been doing. It's hardly the proper thing for a young lady, is it?"

"But, I've been so uneasy! Really, I have hardly been able to sleep for a week!"

"Well, I'll go!" and he stooped over and imprinted a kiss on her hair. "I think you're a little goose, though, for letting the thing worry you that way."

"Perhaps I am," was her tremulous confession. "But it has worried me, just the same. You can't imagine how afraid I am of Lodestone!"

"Pooh!" was his scornful exclamation. "That, for Lodestone! If it wasn't for the land question, I shouldn't have any fears of him whatever. Why, what can he do?"

"Oh, I don't know! I'm almost afraid to think!"

There could be no doubt that she was very nervous, and Frisco saw Cushman soothe her again with another kiss.

Cushman uttered a few more words of a consoling character; then he stepped out into the night, and she went back into the house.

"Hyer we go!" Frisco Ben muttered, as he rolled from beneath the bush and stole softly after his employer. "He's a-goin' to the grave, is he? Then, you bet, I'll go, too!"

Cushman did not take the route which Miss Cushman had always traversed, but went toward the stables. He got a shovel there, whistled to one of the dogs to accompany him, and turned in the direction of the hills.

Frisco was not pleased, when he saw the dog was to go along, but he was given no choice in the matter. The dog knew him well; and, even should it drop back and discover him, he fancied he could quiet it.

Cushman strode straight on, after leaving the stables, and Frisco Ben hung tenaciously to his trail. Ben saw that Cushman was heading for the same point in the hills visited on the previous occasions by the woman.

As they were descending into a small gulch or canyon, the dog scented the pursuer; and running back, began to bark furiously.

Cushman halted and looked inquiringly after the animal.

"What is it, Tige?" he questioned.

Even then he did not seem to suspect he had been followed by any one, appearing to think rather that the dog had encountered some small animal.

"Come away!" he commanded. "Let the thing alone!"

Frisco Ben crouched low in the grass and almost held his breath, hoping Cushman would succeed in inducing the dog to leave him.

"Come on!" Cushman again called. "I haven't time to stop and fool with a badger. Let it alone!"

The dog barked louder than ever, and refused to obey.

Frisco saw he was in a trap.

As the dog would not follow, or heed his commands, Cushman turned back to ascertain the cause of these unaccountable proceedings, still thinking this cause to be an animal.

Seeing that he had succeeded in drawing his master back, Tige leaped about and barked even more furiously than before.

A feeling of consternation took possession of the ex-cowboy. He saw he would be compelled to run for it, or have his identity revealed. Therefore, he picked up a small stone and hurled it with all his might at the dog; and as the dog leaped backward with a yell of pain and fright, Frisco sprang to his feet and darted away.

John Cushman was startled beyond measure; and not until Frisco had gained some distance, did he get anything like a correct understanding of the situation. He saw that the fleeing form was that of a man; though, of course, he could not tell who the man was. Even then it did not enter his mind that the man had trailed him to that place.

He drew his revolver as if contemplating a shot, but put it up again when the receding figure disappeared in the gloom.

The dog had scampered after Frisco, but now returned and whined and whimpered about the feet of his master, seeming not at all satisfied with the way things had turned out.

"Could that fellow have followed me?" Cushman questioned, as he thought more on the circumstance. "It's strange he should be lying out here in the hills! He may have been a tramp, though, or a vagabond Indian."

Neither of these surmises fully satisfied him, however. It seemed unlikely that either a tramp or an Indian would choose such a place for his night's rest.

"Some fellow has trailed me from the house," and a frown came to his face, as he again shouldered his shovel. "I wish I had tried to shoot at him. If it was any one from the house, there is every likelihood it was Frisco Ben. I haven't been pleased with the way he's been acting lately, anyway!"

Cushman was not entirely ignorant of all of Ben's double-dealing. It will be remembered that on one occasion Miss Cushman overheard an important conversation between Ben and Sophie. Yet the reasons which induced Cushman to employ him were potent to retain him in his place.

These reasons, briefly stated, were Cushman's desire to discover through Ben important secrets concerning Lodestone, and also a hope that Ben might be induced to aid him in his fight against the people of Chestnut Burr.

"I'll have to put a watch on him!" moving again in the direction he had been going, with the dog following close at his heels. "Whoever that fellow was, though, it's not probable he'll bother me again to-night; and so I might as well go ahead and do what I set out to do."

And with this he plunged deeper into the heart of the hills.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### AN UNEXPECTED EXPLOSION.

WHEREVER John Cushman may have gone, and whatever may have been his task, he did not tarry long, for within less than ten minutes, he was back on the slope of the hill and hurrying in the homeward direction.

He had been doing some very rapid and clear thinking, since the moment when the suggestion came to him that the unknown may have been Frisco Ben. Many little points to which he had given scant attention now arose strongly in his mind—many little circumstances that had passed almost unnoted. And he was becoming convinced that Frisco had acted toward him in a very treacherous manner.

"If I find I'm right, he'll get out of here lively!" and Cushman ground his teeth in growing rage as he walked onward, with the dog trotting quietly at his heels.

He first turned his eyes in the direction of the kitchen, as he neared the house. He was not unaware of Frisco's affection for the cook, and knew they were in the habit of occupying the kitchen for their lover-like conversations.

No light was shining there, except the flickering shimmer from the fire; but as he passed softly around the corner of the building he thought he heard Frisco Ben's voice.

Frisco seemed to be speaking to the cook, who was replying from time to time.

Cushman bowed his head against the wall, and was startled to hear his own name mentioned.

It was not a good place to overhear the conversation; so he crept further along until his head was just below the window, and only a yard of space separated him from the speakers.

He became sure, now, that he was the subject of their discourse; and his mind reverted instantly to the man who had fled from him in the hills. Frisco Ben seemed to be referring to this flight.

"It was time fer flyin', I thought, an' I jist got out an' dusted, with the dog at my heels!"

Cushman drew in his breath, with a short, hard gasp. All his worst suspicions were amply confirmed. Frisco was certainly the man the dog had routed. And if it was Frisco, then it seemed clear that the cowboy had been guilty of spying.

"I expected to hear a bullet sing by my head," the latter went on, spinning out the incidents for Sophie's edification. "I didn't know, either, but I'd git a chunk o' lead in my body. 'Twas lively times! P'izen lively; an' I made these legs fan like the wings o' a windmill!"

Miss Sophie was snuggling close to her cowboy hero, one of the best and most appreciative listeners any one ever had. She had come to almost idolize Frisco, and on this occasion he seemed determined to raise himself still further in her estimation.

Cushman, on the outside, was working his fingers in a fashion that made his hands resemble the clutching claws of a hawk, while the anger which glowed in his eyes caused those orbs to emit seeming sparks of fire.

"The infernal scoundrel! If I had my hands on his throat, I'd choke him! And that cook—"

He stopped and bent again in a listening attitude.

"The dog tried to ketch me, but it was too much like a kyote tryin' to ketch a wild hoss. I don't think I could run down that hill in broad daylight, the bowlders are so thick; but someway, I missed every one o' 'em, dark as it was."

"And Cushman?" she questioned. "Did ye git to foller him ag'in?"

"I was afraid to," he confessed. "Besides, I didn't know which way he'd gone, when onc't I stopped runnin'. And there was that dog!"

"I'd like to p'izen him!" was Sophie's amiable wish.

"Who Cushman?"

"No; the dog. I al'ays did hate that critter!"

"I wish ye might," and Ben rubbed his nose, reflectively. "He spoiled the hull business fer me to-night. I could 'a' follered John Cushman clean to the end of his trail, without a doubt, if that dog hadn't put in. And then we'd know what there is so 'tractive out there in the hills!"

"I reckon we know, anyhow," as Sophie made no answer. "What she said to Cushman on the steps was enough to show that. It seems to me the most sing'lar thing in the world that I can't find that there grave, much as I've looked fer it; and I reckon I've looked fer it a half-dozen times. Never a day sence she's been so interested in the kyote howlin', but that I've gone out there! And never a thing could I find."

Something like an oath came from between the clinched teeth of the man crouching by the window.

"That fellow knows too much to live long!" and the look that came to Cushman's face was murderous.

There was no one to observe it, of course; a thing which would have been impossible, anyway, because of the gloom.

"I s'pose you mean to search fer it ag'in?" Sophie questioned.

"I 'low to; yes! If there's anything to be found, I intend to find it. Lodestone's instructions air to that effect."

Again a smothered curse came from the lips of the man by the window; and this time something in his hand shone dully in the faint starlight. It was not the blade of the shovel. That was lying on the grass at his side.

"Lodestone thinks they killed the young lady, an' that it's her body the girl is so worried about; an' I guess he's right, jedgin' by what Cushman done to-night."

Sophie Slater shivered very much in the manner she had ascribed to Miss Cushman, and edged closer to the side of her lover.

The coldly, glittering thing in John Cushman's hand was half uplifted, now, and the dim starlight revealed it as a revolver. The murderous look on his face had intensified.

"Do ye reckon he can ever prove it ag'inst 'em?" was Sophie's inquiry, as she shivered again.

Cushman poked the upper part of his face above the widow-sill for the purpose of locating the position of the speakers.

"Hanged if I know!" Ben made answer. "Sometimes I think he will, and sometimes I think he won't. It's been a mighty mysterious piece of business."

"That fellow knows too much to live long!" and Cushman drew down his head as this thought passed through his mind.

Then he softly cocked the revolver, and holding it thus, once more applied his ear to the wall.

Cushman knew that Frisco Ben had had a serious quarrel only the previous day with one of the cowboys. This quarrel had not resulted in bloodshed; but the cowboy was known to possess an extremely revengeful spirit and to set a very low estimate on human life. There seemed nothing more likely than that he might desire to waylay Ben and kill him by a revolver shot;—and Ben had even been cautioned by some of the cowboys to be on the lookout against treachery.

All this recurred to John Cushman as he crouched there by the window, listening to Frisco's talk. He saw how easy it would be to assassinate the man who had been spying on him, without much danger of drawing suspicion on himself. Should he fire a shot through the window and kill Frisco, the common judgment would be that it had been fired by the vengeful cowboy. And thus a most dangerous man might be disposed of.

"It's always seemed a mighty queer thing to me that John Cushman should want to kill his own daughter," Frisco Ben went on, never dreaming of the cocked revolver that was even then being lifted by the murderously-minded man crouching outside. "I never could git that quite straight in my head. An' I don't think Lodestone has, either. But ever'thing seems to pint to the fact that he did kill her; an' so we've been—"

The explosion of the revolver cut short the sentence. Frisco Ben fell forward, and Sophie Slater screamed with terror. But Frisco was on his feet almost in an instant, with his own weapon in his hand.

Although John Cushman had drawn a bead on the cowboy's head, the bullet had not touched it. It had passed through Frisco's hat, though, and plucked away a lock of his hair.

It was not the first time Frisco Ben had been under fire, and he acted with the promptness of a veteran. Fearing the next shot might have a truer aim, he threw himself forward to the floor, so that the bullet, if fired, would pass over him. In this position he got out his own weapon; and then leaped for the opposite window.

Sophie's screams were rending the air, but Ben knew she was not injured. There had been but one shot fired, and that had passed through his hat.

"Git down on the floor!" he whispered, as he sprang away.

As he reached the window, he turned about before plunging through it; and, as he did so, there came another shot, and the weapon's flash showed him John Cushman's face, set in hard and cruel lines.

Frisco returned the shot almost instantly, and then dived for the window. He went through it with a fearful crash, splintering the sash and breaking every glass in it.

His blood was up. He could not doubt, now, that John Cushman had overheard him, and because of it had attempted to kill him.

Leaping to his feet, he ran quickly around the corner of the building, cocking his revolver as he ran. But when he got to the other side, no one was to be seen. John Cushman had disappeared; probably thinking he had accomplished his bloody work.



"I'll have to dig out of this!" was Frisco's comment. "He's found me out, now, an' he'll kill me, sure, if I stay hyer. Likely he thinks I didn't recognize him."

The inference was correct. John Cushman believed he had killed or mortally wounded the cowboy, and did not dream that his own face had been revealed by the flash of the revolver. And in this belief he had sped away.

Sophie Slater was still making the welkin ring; and the cowboys, attracted by the shots, were hurrying from their bunk-rooms and their beds in the stables. Confusion, too, was reigning in the house, lights were flickering, and voices calling.

Seeing that Cushman had vanished, Frisco Ben re-entered the kitchen for the purpose of assuring Miss Slater he was in no wise injured. He found her almost in hysterics; and when he attempted to comfort her, she clung to him and cried over him in a way that made him feel very happy and very foolish.

"I'm all right!" he declared. "Jist got a hole tore through my old hat; that's all!"

Then he lowered his voice and whispered impressively:

"I've got to git out o' hyar, Sophie! 'Twas John Cushman done that, which shows he either recognized me in the hills, or has heard us talkin'. Mebbe both!"

Miss Slater clung to him and refused to be comforted.

He felt he must go, for the cowboys' voices were already heard near the house.

"I'd vise ye to do as I'm a-goin' to: Git out o' hyer quick as ye can. I'm afraid it won't be healthy for either one of us to stay hyer, after this. Better leave to-morrer. I'll git a place fer ye over in Chestnut Burr."

"I will!" she promised. "I won't stay hyer a minute longer'n I have to. I'll go to Carson, where my sister lives."

He kissed her; and then, as the cowboys were swarming around the kitchen, making a loud outcry, he drew himself away, and went out to speak to them.

By this time the Cushmans had made their appearance from the other part of the house—all three of them, Mr. and Mrs. Cushman, and the olive-skinned young lady.

Cushman seemed pale and nervous, and he started when he saw Frisco Ben standing among the cowboys; but he was not more pale and nervous than would seem to be natural at such a time and under such circumstances.

Frisco hastily explained that he had been shot at through the window, but made no mention of the fact that he had recognized the face of the would-be assassin.

He took the company into the kitchen, where a lamp was lighted, and then showed them the bullet-marks on the walls, and the ragged rent in his hat.

Cushman seemed as much interested as any one there, and forced himself to ask many questions.

It was agreed by all that it was a "mighty close call," and but for the fact that the cowboy with whom Frisco had quarreled had bunked that night with an associate, who was ready to testify he had never left his bed, the finger of suspicion would have pointed at him.

"I ain't no low-down sneak!" Frisco's enemy growled. "If I'd wanted to do him up, I'd 'a' met him like a man an' give him a show fer his money. Nobody but a dirty dog 'u'd do a thing like that!"

This bore particular hard on John Cushman, but he heard it without a sign of embarrassment.

"I've got to go to Chestnut Burr to-night," Frisco Ben explained, making ready for his departure while the cowboys were still discussing the incident. "I promised a partic'lar friend o' mine that I'd see him there in the mornin'; an' if I do it, I'll have to go. I come mighty near not bein' in condition fer makin' the trip, too, didn't I?"

He laughed in an easy, careless way, intending this exhibition of mirth for Cushman's especial benefit.

Then he gathered his few articles of clothing together, whispered some sentences to his sweetheart, and set out; John Cushman making no effort to stay him.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

LODESTONE'S astonishment was great when he heard from the lips of Frisco Ben an account of these exciting events. The result of Ben's watchings, culminating as these watchings did in the attempted assassination, seemed almost convincing proof that he had been correct all along in his deeply-rooted conviction that John Cushman and the young woman now posing as his daughter had really murdered Lillie Cushman.

The old difficulties surrounding this view of the case still remained, of course, and were not to be reasoned or explained away.

Frisco Ben was much concerned about Sophie Slater, who had been almost forced by circumstances to remain throughout the night at Cushman's. She had told him she would leave in the

morning and take the train from Silver Hill to Carson City, where her sister resided.

"You may rest assured she is safely on her way before this," was Lodestone's comforting remark, after listening to Ben's rehearsal of his fears. "However much John Cushman might desire to injure her, he has too much sense to make any effort in that line, now. I don't doubt that his will may be good; but, for the present, his fears will hold him in check."

"And so she has gone to Carson? I'm glad of it! I shall want you to go there in a day or two, and it won't be hard, now, to coax you to do it. I'm afraid you'd refuse, with Sophie at Silver Hill."

Frisco Ben flushed, even through his tan.

"I've been figurin' fer an excuse to go down to Carson," was his prompt confession. "An' if you need me there, that'll jist hit me!"

"I'll need you, and you must not fail to go. The Legislature convenes there next Monday, and I expect to have to do some of the tallest fighting of my life. A strong committee is going from here, and Judge Simon Lumpkins will head a similar committee from his place, in my interest. Of course, John Cushman will be there, with his best men and all the money he can rake. Yes, sir; the cinches will tighten in the Legislature."

"Let 'em tighten!" was Frisco's exclamation. "I reckon you're equal to the best that John Cushman can do!"

He rose to go.

"I'll be there; you may count on it! I'd go, even if Sophie hadn't already gone. Meanwhile, if you've got anything for me to do, jist say so, and I'm yer mutton!"

Lodestone Lem realized that he would need all the help he could get from every source in the great contest that was now approaching.

What his plan of campaign was to be, was already pretty well known throughout the district. It had been partially outlined in the *Spine*, and other papers had taken a hand in a general discussion of the merits and demerits of the new judge—the man who had so signally defeated the Hon. Bunkum Landers.

Lodestone meant to impeach this judge in the Legislature, and to use all his efforts to have him tried before a competent tribunal on the charges of immorality, unfitness for office, and drunkenness. If these charges could be sustained, the judge would be deprived of his position, and another chosen to fill his place. Thus the fight for the judgeship would again be brought forward, and Lodestone believed that his chances to win would be better now than they ever had been.

He was busying himself with these thoughts and plans, and making many preparations for his coming trip to Carson and the work to be there performed, when John Cushman entered the office.

Lodestone was naturally surprised to thus behold Cushman. He recalled the events of the night, as they had been related by Frisco, and wondered at Cushman's nerve in visiting him.

But he remembered, also, that Ben had expressed a belief that Cushman was ignorant of the cowboy's knowledge of who had fired the shot; and, taking this view of the case, it was perhaps not so singular that Cushman should call on him.

The occurrences and discoveries of the night would no doubt tend to create in Cushman a feeling of deep uneasiness. The cowboy's various searches to learn the meaning of Adeline Ridges's nightly trips into the hills had become known to Cushman, and no other inference could be drawn by him than that Lodestone Lem was the instigator of these searches. He would be certain of this, even if he had not chanced to overhear Frisco's talk with the cook.

The attempted assassination went to prove, perhaps more than anything else, that Cushman had overheard this talk.

These things passed quickly through Lodestone's mind, as he turned to welcome his visitor.

Outwardly these two had always appeared to be on good terms. Only Lodestone's intimates knew of the occurrence in the canyon, of the whipping in the office, and of the various other misdeeds performed by the masked men.

Cushman took the chair offered him, and glanced nervously at Lodestone, as if at a loss how to begin what he wanted to say.

Lodestone Lem could not fail to note that on Cushman's face there was a perturbed expression, and that the man from Silver Hill was far from being at ease. Ordinarily, John Cushman was one of the coolest and most collected of men; but not so on this occasion.

"Well, the Legislature will meet next Monday," he said, finally, "and then I reckon the big tussle will begin in earnest!"

"That's what I've been calculating on!" was Lodestone's quiet observation. "I guess we're in for a fight, Cushman; and I give you fair warning that I'm going to do you up, if I can. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, you know, and I'm willing to give you that advantage."

The same thoughts that had been in Cushman's mind all morning were still troubling him. He was anxious over the coming contest at Carson City, but he was doubly anxious over what had

happened in the night just past; he was wondering how much of the real truth Lodestone Lem knew or guessed. He did not doubt that Lodestone was wild in many of his surmises; but how much of actual truth did this man of Chestnut Burr know? Yet, though this subject stirred him so deeply, he did not dare to broach it.

"I've come to see if we can't patch up this miserable business in some way," was his frank declaration. "It's gone a long way too far, already. There never was any need of this fight, which was all of your making; and there's no need of it now. If you'll only say the word, it can be stopped before the Legislature convenes. It will be big money in your pocket, Lodestone, to do so. I've told you that more than once, but I desire to say it again."

"How much money?" Lodestone asked, willing to draw him out, though he had no notion of a compromise.

"I offered you a share in the Alcatraz Land Company before. That is a tenth interest; but I'll do better than that. I'll make it a sixth. I hold only four of the shares myself, and you see how it will cut into my interests to give you that much."

He did not conceal his great anxiety. Perhaps he did not try to conceal it. He was working for more than the mere settlement of the Alcatraz land trouble. Lodestone Lem had obtained knowledge which made him dangerous. If he could be taken into this company, he would not be likely to use that knowledge to injure Cushman.

"That's a pretty liberal slice," Lodestone averred, looking earnestly at his old enemy.

"It is," said Cushman. "A very liberal offer. You're a fool, Burton, if you don't take it. If you'll take it, we can settle all these disturbing questions amicably, and to the satisfaction of all; and the result will be that you'll be made a rich man."

"But my friends! Those who have relied on me!"

"We'll leave nothing for them to kick about. I've thought all that out. They're only interested in Chestnut Burr, and in the land and a few of the mines immediately surrounding it. The company can reorganize, after taking you in, and deeds can be made to all these parties, thus fully satisfying them. They'll get what they're fighting for."

"As it is, they may never get anything. If we beat you, they're sure not to, unless they pay well for it. They hold their titles now, from your land and town company. If we beat your company, what will the titles be worth? Not as much as the paper they're written on. They'll have to repurchase everything from us!"

"I tell you, Lodestone, I've been giving the whole matter careful consideration; and even looking at it from your standpoint—and I've tried to place myself in your position—it's the most sensible thing to do. I've talked to some of your leading supporters about it. They think the same way; and are willing for the compromise, if you are."

Lodestone had listened to him in an interested way, and Cushman began to hope his arguments were making some impression.

This hope was now dashed to the ground.

"You are asking impossibilities, Cushman. I don't think I ought to drop this fight, even if I should be requested to by my backers. There is a principle at stake, which ought to outweigh even the money consideration. Your company is trying to steal this land! I don't see that there's any need to mince words. That's what it is! An attempt to steal. Even if the men of Chestnut Burr should agree to your proposition, what is to become of the settlers who are scattered up and down the river valleys? They're poor and hard-pressed by circumstances. They have located their families there, and are trying to get a start in life. Should you possess yourself of the Alcatraz land grant, through my aid, they would lose everything!"

"We'll give them their claims, then!" Cushman urged. "There will be plenty of agricultural and mining lands left. Enough to make all of us rich!"

"But it's a steal!"

"Well, what if it is? There's big money in it!"

"Simply this, Cushman. I'm not a thief!"

Cushman stared at him, somewhat angrily, his teeth hard set.

His manner changed, however, almost on the instant.

"Is there nothing else I can say that will induce you to favorably consider this matter?"

Lodestone was wondering if Cushman would not offer that biggest of all bribes—the one made by Mrs. Cushman—the hand of his daughter; and although this offer was in Cushman's thoughts, he did not mention it, for reasons which must be obvious.

Lodestone was also thinking of the discoveries recently made concerning Adeline Ridges; and these he meant to hurl in Cushman's face, if Cushman gave him favorable opportunity.

But Cushman fought shy of any mention of his alleged daughter.

"Is there nothing else?" he again asked, after he had sat for a moment with head bowed in thought.



"I'm sure there's nothing! I can think of nothing that would influence me to do what you wish."

Cushman arose, bristling aggressively.

"Then, it's fight!" was his angry enunciation. "If you will have it that way, I'll get ready for you, and will give you all you want!"

With this declaration, he stalked wrathfully out of the office.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

##### THE FAIR LOBBYIST.

THERE never was a busier man than Lodestone Lem, when the Legislative session opened in Carson City. The town was crowded with his adherents, and with the adherents of the Alcatraz Land Pirates. Money was being used freely, and influences of every kind brought to bear to further the interests of each side.

Lodestone had Walter Creston with him. Creston was skilled in drafting legislative bills and legal measures, and was in many other ways a very valuable man. Creston's sympathies were with the people of Chestnut Burr, even if his heart was in the possession of John Cushman's fair and pliant tool.

Lodestone had gathered his evidence against the recently elected judge; and, with Creston's aid, was preparing the impeachment resolution which he purposed to introduce in the Lower House.

All was not plain sailing. The Land Pirates had a powerful lobby there, and had already captured a number of the legislative members. The lobby had money in plenty—and money "talks" in Nevada, as it does generally throughout the West—and, for that matter, throughout the world.

One of the leaders of the Land Pirate lobby was the brilliant, dashing and handsome Adeline Ridges, who had come there as the reputed daughter of John Cushman. She was a woman of wit, vivacity and intelligence, and was soon able to make her influence felt, to the great detriment of Lodestone's cause.

The first effect of her presence in Carson City was the weakening of Walter Creston. The old love was still strong on him.

Creston came into Lodestone's room one evening, somewhat pale and agitated. He was silent, too, and took no interest in what was going on, though the points of the resolution he had been drafting were being discussed by Judge Lumpkins and others of Lodestone's friends.

Lodestone noticed the peculiar air of the young attorney, and fearing something was in the wind took him into another room to question him.

Creston was quite as frank as of yore.

"I'm afraid I can't go on with this work," he confessed, when urged by Lodestone to tell the nature of his discouragement. "You'll think me foolish, of course, when I tell you it's because of her!"

"Because of Miss Ridges?"

Creston nodded affirmatively.

"I'm almost ashamed to say it, Lodestone; and I shouldn't say it, if I didn't know I could trust you fully!"

There was such a look of pain on the young lawyer's face that Lodestone's sympathies were quickened.

"What has happened, Creston? You can safely confide in me."

"I know I can," and Creston looked at him, wearily. "It's the same old business. I oughtn't to trust her; and I don't. But, I can't help being influenced by her."

Lodestone saw Adeline had done or said something to induce the young lawyer to desire to quit his service.

"You can safely confide in me," he repeated.

"She has discovered what I'm here for," said Creston, in a subdued voice, "and she, this evening, offered to marry me, if I would juggle this impeachment bill."

A startled light was reflected from Lodestone's eyes.

"You have trusted me to prepare the bill," Creston continued. "You can see how easy it would be for me to put in something, or omit something, that would make it fail utterly of its purpose. And that's what she asked me to do, and she backed up the request with a promise that she would marry me, if I did it."

It was a trap which even the shrewd Lodestone would never have looked for, and it would have been a most dangerous one, if Creston had not been a man of such sterling honesty.

Lodestone looked pityingly at him.

"Pardon me, Creston, for saying so! But, you're too good a man to waste your affections on such a woman. I'm not afraid that you would do the thing she has asked of you, even though tempted by such a bribe."

Creston understood his motive for saying this, and did not reply.

"To marry that woman would be to wreck your whole life! I speak only as your friend, when I say so; and, knowing what sources of information I possess, I don't think you can doubt my sincerity."

"I don't doubt it," admitted Creston. "I know that what you say is only the truth. And yet, I can't help feeling as I do. The very presence of that woman affects me unaccountably. That's why I wanted to tell you that I can't stay any

longer in your service. I'm afraid she would prevail on me to do something I ought not to do."

Lodestone was deeply affected by the young man's earnestness and uprightness of purpose.

"You think it not safe for either you or me, if you should remain longer in my employment?"

"Decidedly unsafe! So much so, that I shall not touch my hand again to that measure, nor to any other measure in your behalf. It would be too much like tempting fate."

"I thank you, Creston, for not yielding to her blandishments. Other men might not have been so strong."

"And I might not be again!" with white lips.

"Is there not some other kind of employment I can give you, then?" in kindest tones.

"No. I'm going back to Chestnut Burr. With her in this town, it isn't safe for me to stay. I intend to leave this afternoon."

"I am sorry to have you go, Creston; and sorry to have you leave me. But I believe, myself, it is for the best!"

Creston went out soon after, and Lodestone Lem returned to the room he had quitted at Creston's coming.

He found Lumpkins alone there, the other members of the conference committee having retired.

Judge Simon Lumpkins was a white-haired money king, made rich by speculations in silver, and he had bills innumerable that he wished to get through the Legislature. His investments in Chestnut Burr were not heavy, though sufficiently so to create within him a lively interest in its success; and he was now desirous of negotiating with Lodestone for the swapping of some votes. That is, Lumpkins controlled a number of votes in the legislative body, and he would have these cast for Lodestone's impeachment resolution, if Lodestone could persuade his friends to cast an equal number of votes for Lumpkins's measures.

When they had talked of this for some time, Lodestone abruptly put the question:

"Where can I get a good lawyer to take the place of Walter Creston? I want one above the influence of the opposing lobby."

Lumpkins very highly recommended his own attorney for the place; and it was agreed that the services of this man should be secured to complete the work which Creston had abandoned.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### AT THE FEAST.

THAT same night, John Cushman gave a great feast to the friends and allies of the Land Pirates. There was music, dancing and merry-making, and Adeline Ridges was the bright particular star of the occasion.

Mrs. Cushman was there, also, using all her subtlety in behalf of her husband.

If Lodestone Lem could have seen the throng there gathered, he probably would have trembled for the security of his plans. Much wealth was represented, for the Land Pirates were in most instances moneyed men, able to gather about them strong adherents.

Neither were Mrs. Cushman and Adeline Ridges the only women present. The femininity of Silver Hill was represented, and there were also beauties there from Carson, and from some of the surrounding mining-towns.

Wine flowed freely, and the toasts to the success of their ventures were rapturously applauded.

The bitterness of the company against the Chestnut Burr faction was constantly apparent, cropping out in the speeches and conversation.

Adeline's beauty and wit made her the center of attraction, and the money-kings vied with each other in paying deferential court to her. Her success and the flattery constantly showered on her seemed to intoxicate her like strong liquor. Never had she been more radiantly beautiful. Her pulses bounded rhythmically, giving a red glow to her dark cheeks, and a starry brightness to her eyes. This was the sort of life she had longed for, and she revelled in it.

She danced constantly and gracefully and almost tirelessly, and her talk had a sparkle and wit that were all her own.

The hour was growing late, and a fat old gentleman was leaning over her, a charmed listener to her words, when Mrs. Cushman approached, with the statement that her presence was desired for a short time in another room.

The fat old gentleman, who knew Adeline only as Miss Cushman, grudgingly relinquished her.

"Barnum Yates wants to see you a minute," Mrs. Cushman whispered, as soon as it was safe to do so. "He came to the kitchen awhile ago and sent up word to that effect. I tried to get him to tell me what he desired, but he would only say that he wanted to see you."

Adeline Ridges had not seen the tramp since his visit to Frisco. She had had an unsatisfactory letter from him, detailing in a hazy way something of what he had done, and asking for more money. She had not sent the money, feeling that he had not earned it.

She had not wished to leave the side of her portly admirer, but now that she knew the tramp was in waiting, she hurried forward

without another thought for the old money king. Her mind was filled with fancies as to the possible nature of Yates's communication, though she feared it might be only another demand for money.

"Hevin' a high old time up there, eh?" was Yates's grumbling protest, when she entered the room where he had been bidden to wait. "Too many old money-bags, I reckon, fer a cove like me to hev any chance! I've been a-waitin' byer till I'm tired!"

The utter disgust of herself, which she always felt when in his presence, swept over her.

"What have you come for? More money?" and her tones were sharp and harsh.

"That's fer you to say. I've gone an' done my work, an' you're to say whether you want to pay me fer it er not."

His manner showed that he considered his communication of a very important character.

"Tell me what you have discovered, and then I can tell you if it will be of any value to me."

"You remember what I wrote ye?" he questioned. "What I wrote about the witness, Ezra Tanner? How he'd skinned out? I've been lookin' fer the feller day an' night, an' now, I've found him."

"Well?" as he paused.

"An' is that all you've got to say? I've found him, an' I kin produce him whenever I want him."

"Perhaps he'll skip out again?"

Yates thrust his tongue against one cheek and winked.

He had not been handsome before shaving, and the new growth of stubby beard covering his face made him appear more disreputable than ever.

"Trust me fer that!"

"Suppose you do bring him forward, what can you accomplish?"

"Everything, fer your side of the case! Lodestone Lem is to bring his impeachment resolution before the house next week, an' he'll hev it voted on jist as quick as he kin. An' I know, if you don't, that if that thing ever comes to a vote, Lodestone is goin' to win. I've been in town all day a-cavassin' the situation. Three men out of every four will tell you that, if they ain't prejudiced."

"I might be so prejudiced as not to believe them."

"Jist as you like about that. I'm givin' you solid chunks of wisdom, though, in sayin' it. Lodestone is bound to beat your friends, if that thing comes to a vote."

"Well?" in that same irritating tone.

"I kin knock Lodestone's scheme all into pi, by bringin' forward this witness. I kin fetch him forward, an' hev Lodestone arrested an' tried, an' jist everlastin'ly ruin him. But I'm not a-goin' to do it jist fer the fun o' the thing."

"You say you want money for it. I presume that is natural enough. But how are we to know, if we pay you the money, that you will do as you say? That you will bring forward this witness and cause Lodestone's arrest?"

"I've provided fer that snag!" with a knowing leer. "I knowed you wouldn't trust me; er feared you wouldn't. But you kin deposit the money in the hands of a third party, to be handed over to me if I do what I agree to an' not otherwise. That's a business-like proposition."

Adeline Ridges was silent for a few moments. "I understand this resolution is to be introduced next Tuesday?" she said, looking up. "Can you get your man here and bring about Lodestone's arrest on Saturday?"

"That's jist what I kin do, miss. I kin git him byer as soon as the train kin bring him."

"And now about the money: How much will you want for this?"

"Two thousand dollars!" was the unabashed answer.

"It strikes me you are aiming rather high!" making no effort to conceal her astonishment. "That is a large sum of money, Mr. Yates!"

"It's wuth it, twice over. Better pay two thousand than lose the Alcatraz land!"

"I can't consider such an offer for a moment, without father's consent," was her averment. "I doubt if he will want to pay so much as that."

"He'll hev to!" the tramp gritted. "He'll hev to, if he wants me to help him!"

In spite of the array of wealth represented that night in the rooms above, Adeline Ridges knew how uncertain was the result of the contest then in progress between the Lodestone and Cushman factions. Two thousand dollars was a large sum of money, but it was as nothing compared with the value of the Alcatraz lands.

"Remain here a few minutes until I can consult with father," she requested, getting up to leave the room.

Barnum Yates chuckled and rubbed his hands, gleefully, when left alone. He believed he had information to sell of such value that his demands could not be ignored. The Land Pirates could not afford to cast aside his offer. The ruin of Lodestone Lem meant everything to them, engaged with him as they were in a life-and-death struggle. The Alcatraz lands were worth millions, compared with which the amount he asked was but a paltry sum.

Thoughts almost similar to these were passing



through the mind of the crafty woman, as she hastened back to the well-lighted rooms, from which still came the sounds of music and laughter.

She sent in a servant to summon Cushman; and when he came out, she told him of the tramp's story.

"I must see him!" Cushman declared, at once deeply interested. "If the man can do what he says, it will be worth more than all the balls and feasts we can give between now and doomsday."

She accompanied him back to the room where she had left the tramp. Yates was sitting in a very easy attitude, his hands in his coat-pockets and his legs crossed, and the smile that sat on his unpleasant face told how confident he was of bringing these people to his terms.

"I won't do it for a cent less than two thousand dollars!" he replied, in answer to John Cushman's question, after the story of the mysterious witness had been re-told. "It's wu'th twice that. Two thousand ain't nothin' to what you fellows 'll make out of it."

"It's a big sum!" said Cushman, dubiously shaking his head. "I don't know whether the company will agree to its payment or not."

He was thinking rapidly. He had no desire to pay the two thousand dollars out of his own pocket.

"Come up-stairs," he urged. "I'll get my principal men together and let them hear what you have to say; and then they can decide the question for themselves."

So confident was Yates of success that he obeyed willingly.

It did not take long for Cushman's servants to cull the men desired from the throng in the dancing-rooms. They came obediently as soon as a whispered word made them aware that an important movement was contemplated.

Adeline Ridges was the only woman who entered the apartment where the conference was to be held. She was recognized by these scheming men as one of their chief allies and emissaries—one who could be trusted with any and all secrets.

The tramp was not at all abashed by the wealthy company in which he found himself. He considered these men only a set of knaves—which they really were—and had small respect for them. Besides, he held to the theory of the common brotherhood of man, and thought his own clay quite as good as that of another.

When all had gathered, he was asked to re-tell his story and re-state his proposition; and this he did with an air of confidence and candor almost unknown to him.

An objection was immediately raised as to the price demanded. These men were willing enough to use him, but they believed they could get his services at a lower figure.

When he stood to his demand, a short conference was held, and then one of the Land Pirates addressed him:

"My man, we'll give you just one thousand dollars for what you offer to do. That is, we'll deposit that sum with a man to be mutually agreed on, in case you succeed in accomplishing your purpose. You are to cause the arrest and conviction of Lemuel Burton on the charge of murdering John Colby; and you will do this—or at least enough of it, in time to destroy his influence and prevent the passage of his proposed impeachment resolution."

"I may not be able to get him convicted," the tramp cautiously urged.

"You say your witness knows of the facts!"

"But he may be able to buy up the jury."

"You're to accomplish the defeat of the impeachment resolution! That's the main thing we're after. If you do that, the money is yours!"

"How much did you say?"

"A thousand dollars."

"I won't do it!" and the tramp sunk resolutely back in his chair.

Again there was a conference.

"We'll make it twelve hundred!"

"Two thousand!" and the tramp doggedly shook his head.

The men believed the tramp would lower his demands, should it seem to become necessary.

"We can't give it. We'll give you twelve hundred."

Yates twisted in his chair, drew his knees up against his chin, and reflected long and carefully.

"I'll tell you what, gents: If you'll make it fifteen hundred, I'll agree to it. But I take my stand at fifteen hundred, and you kin argy from now till mornin' an' I won't make it a cent less!"

They saw he was determined in this; and finally, after much parley, consented to pay him this sum.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### SOMETHING OF A REVELATION.

ALTHOUGH Barnum Yates had acceded to the wishes of the Land Pirates in this respect, he was not at all satisfied, and left the house in an angry mood. He felt he had not been treated with the consideration he deserved. The sum to be paid him was not commensurate with the value of his information to the Land Pirates.

He remained moody throughout the night; and early the next morning stealthily sought the room of Lodestone Lem.

Lodestone had been consulting with his new attorney—the one who had taken the place made vacant by Creston's defection—and the two were at work on the unfinished impeachment bill.

A stern frown came to Lodestone's face, when he beheld his early caller. He had last seen Barnum Yates in San Francisco, and, as will be remembered, under circumstances far from pleasant. The tramp's duplicity and many meannesses were still fresh in Lodestone's mind.

"I'd like to see you fer a minute," Yates timidly ventured, standing just within the entrance, hat in hand.

"I don't know that I can say as much!" frowning more severely.

Thinking Lodestone would probably want to see this uncouth caller alone, the attorney got up from the table and quitted the room. His employer did not attempt to stay him.

"I shouldn't think you'd care to visit me, after what happened in 'Frisco!"

The tramp tried to retain his coolness, but became nervous under Lodestone's penetrating gaze.

"I've been snoopin' round 'Frisco ever sence you was there, an' I've made a discovery which caused me to think mebbe you'd like to see me ag'in."

The hot blood rushed in an angry tide to Lodestone's face.

"Be careful how you fool with me, Yates! I'm in no humor for nonsense."

The tramp had seated himself near the door, that he might retreat easily, should it become necessary. The memory of the 'Frisco occurrence was strong upon him.

"I was to John Cushman's big blow-out last night, an' have got somethin' I'd like to say about it."

His hand was half uplifted toward the door-knob, and he was ready to fly at the first perilous outburst.

The statement cooled Lodestone's rising temper, and he looked at Yates more earnestly and questioningly.

"They had a fly time up there, an' are preparin' to do you up."

"Tell me something not to be so easily guessed, will you? I don't think I can be defeated by feasts and parties."

"You might be by somethin' else, though!" and Yates tried to grin knowingly.

"You don't ask me what it is?" after a moment's pause.

Lodestone looked at him very coolly and calmly.

"They wanted to hire me to tell what I knowed about certain things to your detriment," Yates cautiously continued.

"And you virtuously spurned their offer, I presume!"

"I thought I'd see what you had to say, fu'st!" becoming more aggressive as he saw that no assault was to be made upon him.

"I ought to admire your nerve, Yates, but I don't."

"You won't ask me what it is they wanted me to do? I'll tell you, anyhow. They said if I'd bring about your arrest on that old Colby charge, an' fix you so you couldn't git your bill through the house, they'd pay me big fer it."

"That was after you made them the proposition, I suppose?"

Yates was not making satisfactory progress, and his face showed it.

"Well, yes; if you will hev it that way. I found out a good deal while I was in 'Frisco; more'n you'd want the world to know. Frinstance, I found out where this man, Ezra Tanner, is stoppin' at present."

Lodestone could not conceal all evidence of uneasiness when he heard this.

The tramp saw his advantage growing, and continued:

"You thought you teetotally scared me out of that business, but you didn't. I went there to find that man, an' I found him; an' I kin put my hand on him any minute."

"Well, suppose you can? What of it?"

"What of it?" Yates fairly roared, in his astonishment. "Why, I kin bring him hyer an' hev you behind the walls of a jail in less'n an hour afterwards."

Although Lodestone was much shaken by these revelations, he maintained a stern front.

"Why don't you do it, then? You say the Cushman fellows offer you big pay if you will."

"Because I thought mebbe you'd pay me bigger fer not!" was the blunt reply. "That's why I'm hyer. I'm on the make in this thing, an' the biggest pile takes me."

"You are very frank," was Lodestone's quiet observation. "Too frank, I should think, after your 'Frisco experience."

"You did scare me, then," Yates confessed. "But this one-hoss town ain't 'Frisco by any means. You couldn't sling a cat across the street hyer, without some one knowing of it. You won't dare to shoot me, no odds how much you may want to."

Notwithstanding these bold assertions, Yates

kept glancing at the door to see that the way of retreat remained open.

"I can kick you into the street!" was the angry threat.

"But you won't do it, Lodestone; fer you know if you do, I'll go straight to these Cushman chaps. No, you won't kick me into the street! Not this time, by a jugful!"

Lodestone Lem looked as if he would like to do that very thing on the instant.

"John Cushman and his pals say they'll give me fifteen hundred dollars if I'll git Ezra Tanner hyer an' hev you arrested by Saturday."

The angry blood showed again in Lodestone's face.

"Go on!" he said.

"Now, I've come to say that if you'll pay me two thousand, I'll give them fellers the go-by, drop the hull thing, an' leave the town. You must know, Lodestone, that if I stick by them, it'll hurt ye bad, an' bu'st this impeachment business all to bits!"

The hot blood was still in Lodestone's face as he made answer:

"You think you're very smart, Yates, but you're not half so smart as your fancy has pictured. When you send for this man, Tanner, I don't think you'll find him."

The tramp was not shaken by the statement.

"I hev'n't told all the things I found out while I was in 'Frisco! I reckon now, it'd surprise ye, if I'd tell you I know who this Ezra Tanner reely is. He's your own brother, Silas Burton; an' he's the feller that reely killed the sailor, John Colby. Ye see I wasn't asleep while I was down on the coast."

Lodestone could not but betray his surprise. It was information he believed could not be readily gained.

"You're a devil, Yates!"

"Thank ye fer the compliment!" grinning in a way to show his yellow teeth, while his fingers twitched nervously.

"I don't know how the story ever got out that you was the murderer. You was arrested fer it because they believed you was Silas; an' when you showed you wasn't, they let you go. An' ever sence, Silas has been in hidin', an' you've been furnishin' him with money to live on."

Lodestone did not reply immediately. When he did there was a tremor in his voice.

"Since you have found it out, I may as well confess that the man you have supposed to be the witness, Ezra Tanner, is my brother Silas. But if you knew how he has suffered, it seems to me even your callous heart would soften a little. The killing of John Colby was not murder. And yet I'm afraid there are men willing to swear that it was. My brother was a sailor, too, and like most sailors became too fond of liquor. He got into a quarrel with Colby, at the latter's boarding-house, and in the fight that followed accidentally killed him. That is the truth. Silas has told me all about it many a time, and I'm satisfied he did not try to deceive me. However culpable he may have been, he has already been severely punished."

He did not make this statement as an appeal to the tramp's better nature, knowing that such an appeal would be useless.

"That's all right!" was Yates's threatening assertion. "All I know is that he killed John Colby, an' if he's caught, he's likely to hang fer it!"

"With all this information in your possession, how do you expect to help Cushman by bringing about my arrest?"

"I ain't a-goin' this thing blind, Lodestone. I can cause your arrest, an' bring on witnesses, an' raise sich a row that you'll not be able to git that bill through the Legislature. I'll put my hand on that brother of yours, an' it'll be that either he'll hev to suffer er you. You ought to know whether you want me to do this thing or not."

"That, for your threats against me!" snapping his fingers.

"You don't think I kin hurt ye?"

"I don't think you can hinder the passage of that bill."

Yates still seemed to imagine he had Lodestone foul.

"I kin drag that precious brother of yours out of his concealment!"

It was apparently the only thing Lodestone feared. Because of this fear, he had so long borne the threats of the tramp, and even suffered his own good name to be clouded.

"Nobody but you and two or three others ever thought I was the slayer of John Colby," he averred, reflectively. "Frisco Ben got the same idea; and I suppose it all arose out of the fact that I was arrested on that charge."

"What do you say to my proposition?" Yates questioned, ignoring the remark.

"What is it?"

"Gimme two thousand dollars, an' I'll go my way an' say nothin' about any o' this business. The other fellers offered me fifteen hundred."

"I couldn't pay it, Yates, if I wanted to!"

He got up and walked restlessly back and forth.

"I've tol' ye the consequences if ye don't!" more fiercely than ever.

Lodestone saw that the tramp was in deadly earnest, and was wondering what he had better



do in this emergency. He doubted the tramp's ability to defeat the impeachment resolution. But there was no telling what the scoundrel might accomplish, aided as he would be by the entire Cushman faction. The arrest, should it be made, would crowd so closely on the day in which the bill was to be introduced, that Lodestone would scarcely be given time to counteract its effect, and defeat the force of the thousand wild rumors which would be set afloat.

All this he saw clearly, and the desire was strong on him to take the tramp by the heels and hurl him down the stairway.

"You'll have to give me time to think it over," he said at last, again facing Yates. "Two thousand dollars is more money than I have now."

"How long do you want?" Yates grumbled.

"Until this time to-morrow."

The tramp was loth to concede even this much time, but he yielded finally, and left Lodestone to his own thoughts.

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

##### THE EFFECT OF A BLOW.

LODESTONE decided he would not pay the two thousand dollars demanded of him; and, soon after the tramp's departure, he visited the telegraph office, and sent a carefully-worded message to his brother in San Francisco. His brother had left his rooms in the tumble-down building, as Lodestone had instructed him to do, but he was still in hiding, under his false name. The message gave a hint of the danger impending, and urged him to once more change his location, and to keep himself carefully concealed.

Lodestone felt better after having done this. It promised to head off the schemes of the tramp, and he was able to go back to his office and return to the work which Yates's visit had interrupted.

But Barnum Yates was quite as shrewd as Lodestone. He had suspected all along that the latter would try something of the kind.

He called again at Lodestone's office, after nightfall, and there was on his yellow face a pleased smile that held more of fiendishness than can well be imagined.

"You thought you was terrible sharp, Lodestone," chuckling as he made the statement, although he saw that Lodestone was far from relishing this second visit. "But when you git ahead of Barnum Yates, you'll hev to git up with the early worm."

Lodestone could not anticipate anything agreeable from this beginning.

"I was down there at the office when you sent that tellygram!" chuckling again and rubbing his saffron-bued fingers together. "That was real cute, that was!"

"What do you mean?" Lodestone sternly asked.

"I thought you'd try that, an' so I slipped down just to make sure. I was a-layin' on one of the seats in the waitin'-room when you brought yer message in, an' I heard the operator click it off. Ekal to tappin' a wire, wasn't it? I guess, now, you never knowed that I used to be an operator myself, away back in the days o' my balmy youth?"

"I didn't know you had ever been anything but a tramp."

Lodestone was terribly taken aback.

"An' yit you hired me to stick type on't!"

"But that ain't neither hyer ner there. I read yer tellygram, an' when you'd gone away, I sent another to my man. The chances air that he'll git his as quick as yer brother Silas'll git his, an' he'll take steps to block yer little game."

Lodestone quite lost his temper, as he listened to this diabolical confession.

"You didn't think I'd go into this thing without gittin' all the ropes ready, did ye? When I located that fine brother of yours, I hired a man to watch him; allowin', of course, that you'd hev him to change his nest ever' day or two."

"Now, they ain't any use in wigglin' about this matter. You've either got to pay me the two thousand dollars, or I'll go an' git John Cushman's fifteen hundred. It's fer you to say which I'll do?"

Lodestone's blood was boiling, but he restrained himself, realizing that if ever there was a time for cool thought, this was the time.

"You said you would give me until to-morrow morning."

"But I've changed my mind. I'm like the weather, li'ble to sudden changes."

"You'll have to wait the time agreed on," Lodestone insisted. "I haven't the two thousand, now, if I wanted to pay it to you; and I'm not sure that I want to."

"If ye don't gimme the money, now, or fix it so that I kin git it at onc't, I'll go straight from hyer to John Cushman's."

"Go!" said Lodestone, almost losing control of himself. "Go, before I pitch you into the street!"

He advanced threateningly, and Yates, fearful of his wrath, retreated precipitately from the room.

He was not to escape so easily, however. As he leaped into the hallway, hurling a defiant

sentence at Lodestone, he found himself face to face with Frisco Ben.

Frisco was on his way to the office. He saw from the tramp's manner, as well as the words, that something was wrong. He also beheld, by the light of the office lamp, the look of pain that was on the face of his friend. He held for the tramp only a bitter hatred, and, ever since the day of his pugilistic efforts in the stable at Chestnut Burr, he had ached to give Yates a sound drubbing.

It was a moment of excitement, and at such a time one does not measure the force of his blows. He struck out furiously at Yates, as the latter attempted to pass him. The blow caught the tramp under the chin and hurled him senseless to the carpetless floor. He fell with a crash that seemed prophetic of broken bones.

"You scaly scoundrel!" Frisco Ben exclaimed, leaping forward as if to repeat the onslaught. "I'm a notion to murder ye!"

He was restrained by Lodestone, who had instantly hurried out of the office. He pulled Ben back with a harshness that was uncommon.

"Don't hit him again," he adjured. "That blow was enough to kill an ox!"

Frisco looked bewilderedly and somewhat fearfully at the tramp, who did not stir, but lay in a heap where he had fallen.

Lodestone made a slight examination of Yates's condition, and then said:

"I guess you haven't hurt him seriously, though you've knocked him out for a time. Better run down on the street and make arrangements to have him taken to the hospital. Then, give yourself up to the police, should it become necessary."

Frisco was accustomed to unquestioning obedience; and in a little while the tramp was being conveyed along the streets. Frisco accompanied the escort, and even tarried to learn what the doctor had to say of the case. He feared an investigation might cost him trouble; and without further delay hurried back to Lodestone's room.

"A slight concussion, the doctors said. 'Twasn't my lick that did it, so much as 'twas the fall on the floor. He'll come around in a few days. Jist now, he don't know anything."

This was the cowboy's statement of the facts to his superior.

"How many days?" Lodestone questioned, with more than ordinary eagerness.

"He won't be wuth much for a week or so, was the way I understood it."

Ben was nervously thinking of the possible results of an arrest.

"I was sorry you struck him, awhile ago," Lodestone quietly returned, "but now I can't say that I am. If he's so situated that he can't do any mischief for a week, it will be a big thing for me."

He saw the curiosity in Ben's countenance; and forthwith proceeded to recount to him the incidents of the evening.

"I'm glad I tackled him!" and Frisco set his teeth firmly. "I only wish I'd done him up for a month!"

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

##### LEGISLATIVE TACTICS.

ONCE more Lodestone Lem visited the telegraph office and sent a message to his brother in San Francisco. The object of this was to warn Silas of the spy who in all likelihood would endeavor to shadow his movements.

Frisco Ben's attack on the tramp seemed almost providential. With Yates in an unconscious condition in the hospital, Lodestone could proceed with his work without fear of interference from that quarter.

The next morning he learned that the Cushman men had discovered the tramp's whereabouts and condition and that they were untiring in their devotions to him. The very best doctor in the town had been summoned by them, and was now using his utmost skill to restore him. But the concussion was a severe one, and it was a question if Yates would regain sufficient intelligence and memory to be of material service before the day set for the introduction of the resolution.

Lodestone held a consultation with Lumpkins, and it was agreed that other matters should be cleared out of the way and the bill be introduced and pushed to a vote on the coming Monday.

Lodestone was in a fever of impatience. He felt it was now or never, if he did not wish to yield to the tramp's demands. How he worked!

When the Monday came, Yates was in the same comatose condition. He had revived several times, and there was no doubt that he would eventually pull through all right. But in none of those intervals of comparative lucidity was Yates sufficiently at himself to convey to the Cushman element the secret he had so carefully concealed from them. They knew there was a man in San Francisco, known as the witness, Ezra Tanner, and they put forth every effort to discover him. The services of detectives of that city were secured, but all to no purpose. Neither Tanner nor the man whom the tramp had set to shadow him could be unearthed.

This was the state of affairs when the all-important Monday arrived.

They were reasonably sure that Lodestone would introduce his resolution at the first opportunity, and that his friends would aid him in pushing it forward to a speedy vote; and they organized their forces to oppose and defeat this plan.

The fight that ensued between these opposing hosts was a fierce and relentless one. The Cushman people were fighting for delay, and Lodestone's men struggling for an immediate hearing.

Lodestone introduced his resolution early, had it read and referred to a committee, and now it was learned that that committee would be ready to report it back to the house for action by three o'clock that afternoon. It was quick work; and was only made possible by the fact that the committee to whom it had been referred consisted largely of Lodestone's sympathizers.

All morning, while the battle raged, messengers hastened from the legislative hall to the hospital and back again, bringing reports of the tramp's condition to Cushman. The tramp was conscious for a few moments, at one time, and the physician having his case in charge was confident he would entirely recover his senses soon.

Hence, it can be seen how precious were the rapidly-flying moments to the factions battling against each other in the State House.

When the afternoon session was called, Lodestone and his friends noticed that there was a freer and more hopeful look on the faces of the Cushman men, and they at once divined mischief. They had news showing that the tramp was in no condition to serve the Land Pirates, and so they began to look elsewhere for the cause of this unexpected buoyancy.

It was not long in being revealed.

Judge Simon Lumpkins came nervously into the room, and hurrying up to Lodestone whispered:

"The very mischief's afoot, Lem! Come outside where I can speak to you a minute!"

Lumpkins's manner was so impressive that Lodestone followed him with a feeling of much perturbation.

"It's all the work of Adeline Ridges," the judge whispered, when the two were where they could speak freely. "It's a neat little scheme, though I don't see how any of our men could have been fools enough to be taken in by it."

Lumpkins was a big-framed, beefy man, and he stopped for breath.

"You see it's this way," making gestures with his forefinger. "Cushman gave a little dinner or something of the kind up at his house awhile ago, and it seems that Miss Ridges managed to induce some of our fellows to attend it. They had wine, of course; and every mother's son of them is now as unfit for duty as is the tramp!"

"The wine was drugged?" Lodestone questioned.

"It must have been. Not one of the men can get here, and if they could be got here, they wouldn't be able to vote. We must change our tactics, now, and fight for delay. Cushman's men feel that they've got us; and they have, if we can't stave the thing off a few hours."

The situation was critical. No one realized it better than Lodestone; and the two friends laid their heads together for the purpose of discovering some means by which this newest and most dangerous scheme of Cushman's might be defeated.

A caucus of the Lodestone faction was at once held, and it was agreed that the debate on the resolution must be kept up at any and every cost until these foolish members of the House could be restored to a condition to fit them for their duties.

The fight that afternoon was even hotter than the one witnessed in the morning. Lumpkins himself made a speech of two hours' duration; and when he concluded it, Lodestone's silver voice took up the thread of debate in an address that promised to be even longer.

In vain Cushman's men strove to bring the matter to a final vote. The policy of Lodestone's adherents was that of delay and obstruction; and so well did they hold their own that when the shades of night gathered, the time-killing speeches were still under way with an apparent determination to continue them all night, if necessary.

Lodestone had already occupied the floor for three hours, fearful that if he gave it up a motion for the previous question would prevail and the vote be at once forced upon him. As he stopped to moisten his lips from a glass of water conveniently near, he fumbled with the book he had been referring to, and seemed equal to an other three hours of steady talk.

Cushman's followers were in despair. A number of those who had been rendered incompetent by the drugged wine were once more in their places, and a delay of another hour promised to restore all of them. There was no such thing as shutting off Lodestone's flow of words. No limit had been fixed for the debate, and he might go on as long as he could find anything to say and was able to stand up and say it.

Only a matter of confusion had prevented



them from getting the floor when Lumpkins sat down. This was their opinion, though Lodestone had been reasonably sure of a recognition from the speaker, and he was the first man on the floor to catch that individual's eye.

Lodestone had re-commenced his speech with the seeming ability to continue it indefinitely, when another change was brought about by the incoming of a messenger who whispered a few words to Cushman. Cushman was told by this man of the tramp's return to perfect consciousness.

He was on his feet instantly, and succeeded in making himself heard.

"Our friends are fighting for time. If they are willing, we shall be pleased to give them all the time they want; and if Mr. Burton will permit me to make the motion, I shall move that this house do now adjourn until eight P. M."

Lodestone had not waived his right to the floor because of this interruption. He paused a minute to consider the possible advantages to be gained by Cushman, should he allow this motion to be put. It was nearly three hours until eight o'clock. He could not hope to hold the floor longer than that time, and an adjournment would seem to be as good a way to fill in this interval as speech-making.

He bent down and whispered a few words to Judge Lumpkins, while every one within the room remained in silent expectancy.

"You might as well let them do it," Lumpkins whispered back. "There are two of our men so badly drugged that they can't possibly come around before that time. I had the information just a few moments ago from the physician. We can't push our bill through without their vote."

Lodestone was reasonably sure, from Cushman's change of tactics, that the tramp had recovered. He thought a little longer, after consulting with Lumpkins, and then yielded the floor to let Cushman make his motion—Cushman being a member of the body, and having a right to vote by virtue of an election from his own county.

The motion was put and carried with a whoop and hurrah; and the lower house of the Legislature had adjourned until the hour set for the night session.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

##### THE FACE IN THE GALLERY.

FRISCO BEN was almost the first man seen by Lodestone as he left the room.

Frisco had learned of the tramp's recovery of his mental faculties, and was much disturbed thereby.

Lodestone explained the nature of the situation to him, and the two continued on toward Lodestone's office.

They found a messenger there awaiting them—a messenger from the tramp. Yates had sent by him a demand for the immediate payment of two thousand dollars, with a threat of instant revelation and exposure and a telegram ordering the brother's arrest, if the money was not paid.

Lodestone had hardly expected this, thinking Yates had already sold out to the Cushmans.

"I shouldn't put up a cent," Frisco averred, glaring at the messenger as if he had thoughts of personally castigating him for his presumption.

Lodestone took time to fully consider the matter before replying to the demand. He had had no word from Silas, and it was possible that Yates's San Francisco spy knew of Silas's whereabouts. Yet he did not much fear that an arrest would be made by the San Francisco officials on a mere order to do so, sent by telegraph. It would not be so made, should the message be sent by so insignificant a person as Barnum Yates; but if sent by John Cushman, the Frisco officials might view it in a different light.

It was likely the tramp relied more on Lodestone's fear of personal arrest than on this San Francisco matter. Lodestone reasoned, however, that as the night session was so near at hand, it would be impossible for John Cushman to do much in the limited time at his disposal. Cushman might bring about Lodestone's arrest; but Lodestone had many friends who would stand ready to bail him out, no matter what charge might be brought against him.

He did not intend to pay the two thousand dollars demanded by Yates, and was only studying how he could evade it with the least friction and injury.

"I'll go and see him," he said at length, giving this as his answer to the messenger.

It did not take him long to reach the hospital, where he was shown into the whitewashed ward occupied by Yates.

The tramp had evidently more than half-expected the visit, for he looked up inquiringly as if anticipating the payment of the money.

"What's the use of pushing this thing, Yates?" Lodestone demanded, anxious to discover what Cushman had done. "You can't crowd me to the wall, now. You're a little too late for that, don't you think?"

The stubby growth of beard had been removed from Yates's face, and his yellow skin had a whitened and bleached-out appearance. But his eyes held the same old covetous sparkle.

"Mebbe you think so, but I don't. Cushman's comin' hyer in ten or fifteen minutes, an' when he comes, I've agreed to tell him ever' thing. I've kep' the thing back jist because I wanted to see you, an' the only way I was able to do it was by pretendin' to be still a little shaky in my memory. But I tol' him I'd hev the thing thought out an' ready fer him when he come ag'in, which will be now in a little while."

Lodestone gave the crafty, scheming scoundrel a look of withering contempt.

"It's a pity that blow didn't end you!" he ejaculated. "I should think a man who has been as near to death's door as you have would be minded to show some little consideration for others. But you haven't any more heart than a mountain wolf!"

Yates winced a little, but he did not lower his demands.

"That's all right, Lodestone!" with the usual showing of his yellow teeth. "You kin talk as loud as you please, but I reckon I've got the whip-hand of ye. You'll either come down with that dust right now, or I'll turn my knowledge over to John Cushman as soon as he gits hyer."

Lodestone drew away from him with a look of disgust, and got up to leave the room. He had come to a decision.

"Turn over to him everything you can, if you desire to!" he retorted. "I think, Barnum Yates, that the hour for you to succeed has gone by. I ought never to have given in to you, for one instant; and I'm almost sorry that I did. If you've got the whip-hand, as you think, crack your whip!"

With this he strode angrily from the place and returned to his office.

He felt that whatever John Cushman might be able to do could not now be done speedily enough to prevent the passage of the bill. Within less than two hours the vote on the committee's favorable report ought to be taken. The evening paper was already out, and it was not likely to issue a second edition to give circulation to the tramp's story, unless hired to do so by Cushman. The circulation of the slanderous matter in handbills could certainly not accomplish the desire of the Cushman men.

He had determined to fight Yates, and if necessary was willing to spend the money which the tramp had tried to force from him in this struggle, and in shielding and defending his brother.

He sought Judge Lumpkins and sent him to see the proprietors of the papers with a view to heading off any effort Cushman might make in that direction. Then he got his supper, and employed the remainder of the time until the opening of the night session in rallying and bracing his adherents for the final stand.

He expected every moment to be placed under arrest, or to feel Cushman's hand in some manner, but the time passed without any such interruption.

The cause of this lay in the tramp's great cupidity. Believing his information invaluable, he had suddenly raised his demand on Cushman to five thousand dollars. Cushman was not ready or willing to pay it, and could not guarantee it without seeing some of his moneyed friends.

"Lodestone is to give me three thousand, if I keep still on the subject," was Yates's statement to Cushman, "and you'll hev to raise them figures. I want five thousand dollars, an' I must hev it right hyer in my fist before I make a move!"

The legislative room was packed that night to the point of suffocation. An intense interest had been created throughout the town by the report of the afternoon's proceedings, given in the evening paper. There was scarcely standing room in the galleries, and the crowd booted and yelled and screamed at every seeming advantage gained by either side, according as their sympathies dictated.

Lodestone got the speaker's attention, and continued the address which had been interrupted by John Cushman's motion to adjourn. With an eye to the vast audience present, he hastily ran over the main points of the debate, making everything as clear as possible. He had a ready and fluent delivery, a quick wit, and an earnest and persuasive manner that quite captivated his hearers.

He was concluding his peroration, and his eyes were dwelling on the crowding people in the gallery, when he beheld a face that caused the blood to rush bewilderedly to his brain. For a moment his head swam, and a feeling of reeling faintness came over him. The crowd was almost blurred until invisible and the wild shouts sounded far away in his ears.

He had seen the face of Lillie Cushman, and she had been looking down on him as if evidently pleased with his speech!

"It was the fair-haired Lillie Cushman—the beauty he had seen on that first visit to John Cushman's residence near Silver Hill!"

It was, in truth, the woman he had so long mourned as dead.

There could be no doubt about that. He could never forget that face and form; and, thus seeing her, it is no wonder that his brain reeled giddily and the sights and sounds of that great struggle almost faded into nothingness.

When he looked again, the face and figure

were gone; and he had no doubt she had observed his perturbation, and, seeing that her presence was discovered, had hastily quitted the gallery.

Where had she come from? Why was she there? Why had she so suddenly taken her departure on being recognized by him?

His speech was not finished, but he sat down, gasping; and Lumpkins and others crowded about him, thinking him overcome by the heat and his too great efforts.

"Go on with the debate," he whispered to Lumpkins. "I've got to get out of here a minute. Don't let those fellows get ahead of us. I'll be back in time to vote."

The audience, as well as the members of the house, were in an uproar. The word was passed quickly about that Lodestone Lem had fainted or fallen in a fit.

A dozen men were on their feet in an instant, struggling for recognition. The speaker pounded the desk with his gavel, and shouted for order. Utter confusion reigned.

But, Lodestone's thoughts were no longer with these scenes and interests. He was thinking of the face he had so unexpectedly beheld. What was the meaning of it? He had long thought of that face as the face of one dead. Yet, here it had been in the crowded gallery of that chamber, the roses on the cheeks as of yore, and the eyes as bright and sparkling as when last he had seen them! It was all an incomprehensible mystery.

A doctor hurried forward, believing his services needed, but Lodestone had regained his feet. His face was white and drawn, and there was a strange look in it.

"Go on with the debate!" he again whispered to Lumpkins. "Keep them busy until I can get back. I'll explain to you later."

He brushed the doctor aside, without any intention of rudeness, however, and started for the door. Those nearest fell back as he came toward them, and though Lumpkins essayed to detain him, he gained the door and disappeared.

He hurried first toward the gallery where he had seen the face. He was satisfied Lillie Cushman had vanished from the crowd, and looked for her on its outskirts.

When he did not find her there, he hurried down again: searched for her a moment at the entrances, and then rushed blindly into the street. She was to be seen nowhere, and after a short time, he turned with a heavy heart back toward the legislative chamber.

He could hear the voice of John Cushman above the uproar and confusion, but the proceedings had suddenly lost interest for him. What did it matter whether the great fight for Alcatraz land was lost or won, if he should not get to see her again?

The old love which had been a smoldering and sorrowful memory, had risen again in his heart, full-armed. No phoenix ever leaped more strongly from the ashes of its death.

He would find her! He would unravel this great mystery! He would tell her of his great love and of his great grief!

And in an intoxication of excitement and joy, he re-entered the room, just as the vote was being called.

#### CHAPTER XXXIX.

##### A VAIN SEARCH.

THE names of the members of the house were being called slowly and deliberately, one by one, and their vote being recorded. Lodestone Lem got back into his place with as little observation as he could, and voted "Ay!" in a clear, firm voice, when his name was reached.

The most intense excitement prevailed, though the shouting and calling had now ceased. Every one was listening to the answers to be given, with an interest that was thrilling, even though they knew in advance what those answers would be.

Lodestone's men were standing firm, and there could be no question as to the outcome of the vote.

Just at this time there came an interruption, however, that promised to inject complications.

One of Cushman's messengers rushed into the room and thrust into the hands of his chief a bit of paper.

"Hold!" Cushman cried, leaping up with face aflame. "I have here a telegram that I wish to read before any more votes are taken!"

An indescribable uproar ensued. A dozen men were on their feet at once, each shouting with all his might—Lodestone's men screaming for the vote to go on, and the opposition clamoring for the reading of the message.

Again the speaker pounded his gavel until it seemed he would surely shiver it in pieces. The cries and confusion continued until Judge Lumpkins succeeded in getting the ear of the chair and was recognized.

Lodestone and his friends thought they knew well enough what that message contained, and they were resolved it should not be read. They believed it to be a telegram from San Francisco, telling of the arrest of Lodestone's brother, and asserting that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of Lodestone himself as an accomplice in the crime of murder. They believed that its reading at that moment could not affect the



vote, but they were not willing to take any chances. On the other hand, Cushman's friends were resolved that the contents of the telegram should be made known.

"I submit to the judgment of the speaker," and Lumpkins drew up his broad form in the most impressive manner, "that this is not the proper time for the introduction of outside matters. I don't know what that message contains—I understood my friend to say it was a message—nor do I care. But we are now taking a vote on this resolution. The names of a number of representatives have already been called, and they have answered according to their choice. It is unparliamentary and a violation of every rule to inject any extraneous matter, or to seek to start a debate at this juncture."

John Cushman leaped up to reply, but was promptly hammered down by the speaker.

"I think Judge Lumpkins is correct!" the latter shouted, raising his voice to make himself heard above the uproar. "The time for debate on this question has passed by."

"We don't want to debate the question!" Cushman roared. "I have simply here a telegram of general interest, which I desire to read."

"Cries of 'Out of order! Put him out! Sit down!' came from the Lodestone faction, and from the galleries where the spectators were congregated.

"I insist!" Cushman howled, waving the telegram above his head.

Again the cries came. Again the speaker pounded his desk; and shouted:

"You'll take your seat, Mr. Cushman. You're entirely out of order!"

"I will read it!" Cushman screamed, raising his voice still higher.

His words were drowned by the angry yell that arose around him.

The speaker again hammered his desk, growing red and frantic in his vain efforts to bring quiet out of this chaos of confusion. But Cushman would not sit down, though some of his enemies were already struggling to get at him.

"It's from San Francisco!" he shouted. "And it tells of the arrest of a brother of Lodestone Lem, and that a warrant has been issued for the arrest of Lodestone himself! On the charge of murder! On the charge of murder!"

His words were not generally understood because of the disorder prevailing, but many members caught them; and one of Lodestone's men roared back:

"Why don't you arrest him, then? Sit down!"

"You know that a member of this body is practically free from arrest, while in the discharge of his duties, and especially when sitting in this chamber!"

He sunk back, completely exhausted by his efforts, and, after a seemingly interminable delay, order was in a measure restored, and the speaker announced that the count of the vote would now proceed.

The result showed that this latest effort of John Cushman's had been without effect. Every member stood to his ground, and not a vote was changed by it. The resolution passed.

As soon as this was known, Lumpkins was on his feet again, with a motion for an immediate adjournment. It was carried with a rush; and the members, rising in a body, began to stream excitedly from the chamber.

Lodestone grasped Lumpkins warmly by the hand, muttered his incoherent thanks, and then staggered half blindly into the street. He knew he had triumphed, but felt that the contents of that telegram would soon be in the mouths of every one.

He was not thinking so much of this, however. In fact, he was at that moment scarcely thinking of it at all. He was thinking of the face he had seen in the gallery. Not for an instant had it been out of his mind, even throughout all that mad turmoil.

His first work was to hunt up Frisco Ben and tell him of his singular discovery.

Frisco was astonished beyond measure, and asked many questions before he could be brought to believe that Lodestone had not been the victim of a delusion. Lodestone, however, was so certain of his facts, and altogether so positive, that Frisco could not long remain a doubter.

Lodestone could not reasonably account for what he had seen. It upset all his previous calculations and created a mental confusion such as he had never known. Nevertheless, he clung tenaciously to what he conceived to be the truth.

Lillie Cushman, the fair-haired—the woman he had idolized and whom he had mourned as dead, was alive! He had seen her with his own eyes. She must be in Carson City at that moment! And, if in Carson City, she must be found!

These were the only things clear to him, but they were enough to stir him to the depths of his being.

Frisco had no ready plans to suggest, though he was willing and anxious to give Lodestone all the aid in his power.

In default of anything better, they betook themselves to John Cushman's Carson residence. Here, while Lodestone remained in a fever of impatience without, Frisco made his way to the

kitchen, and bribed a maid whom he found there, to tell him if Lillie Cushman was in the house.

She was; but investigation showed that the maid referred to Adeline Ridges, and not to the fair-haired girl for whom Lodestone was so wildly seeking. Of her, the maid knew nothing. She had never seen her nor heard of her. She was not there, and had not been there!

This was the unsatisfying information that Frisco carried back to his waiting friend.

Further searches were made in all possible and impossible directions; but they resulted in nothing.

Frisco retired from the field after a time, thoroughly worn out.

But Lodestone Lem continued to walk the streets; and there daylight found him, staring first at one house and then at another, wondering if she was behind the walls of any of them.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DETECTIVE'S LETTER.

JOHN CUSHMAN had deliberately lied in the legislative chamber the night before. The message which he waved above his head so triumphantly, and which he was bent on reading, was but a trumped-up affair.

Barnum Yates had sold his secret to the Land Pirates, but the information had not come soon enough for the accomplishment of Cushman's purposes. In default of this, the pretended message had been prepared, and Cushman had tried to palm it off as genuine, believing that the effect would be the same. He expected to bring about the arrest of Lodestone and his brother, and reasoned that this information of the fact in advance would answer quite as well as if the deed had been done.

But he had been defeated; and, as he thought the matter over afterward, there came a change in his plans. The threat of arrest might be more powerful than the arrest itself. The battle was not yet ended. Lodestone had triumphed, it is true, in the Legislature; but the obnoxious judge had not yet been convicted of the misdemeanors charged against him, and could not be removed from his position until that was done. Therefore, the ground of the battle would only be shifted. Perhaps even yet, he might scare Lodestone from pushing the matter further.

It seemed almost useless to hope for such a thing, and yet Cushman was in such desperate straits that he was ready to grasp at anything.

When Lodestone returned to his office that morning, he found John Cushman awaiting him. Both looked haggard and worn, the result of the excitements of the previous day and night. Lodestone had had no sleep, and was preyed on by great anxiety.

When he saw Cushman a great desire came over him to speak to this man of the face he had seen in the gallery; but he repressed it, and somewhat coldly invited Cushman to enter the office.

Lodestone had brought his morning's mail with him; which, however, he had not looked at, and still held in his hands.

"I have come to talk over that matter again," said Cushman, seating himself rather awkwardly, for Lodestone's coolness did not augur a favorable termination to the interview.

It did not seem necessary to say what matter was referred to.

Lodestone tossed the letters carelessly on the table. As he did so, he noticed that one was post-marked San Francisco, and he bent curiously over it. The superscription was not in his brother's handwriting.

Cushman prevented its opening by continuing:

"You have won in the first heat, Lodestone, but I scarcely need say to you that the race is not finished."

"I think the outlook is fair, though," and Lodestone toyed with the letter, wondering a little what it contained, but with his mind on John Cushman and Lillie.

Cushman hardly knew how to begin what he wanted to say.

"You're aware, of course, that the arrests mentioned by me last night have not yet been made," he ventured.

"Fully aware of it, so far as I'm personally concerned!" in tones which did not grow warmer.

"And yet you know, too, that I can bring those arrests about at any time."

Lodestone was nervous and excitable that morning, and it took little to kindle his wrath.

"I'm not so certain of that!" with a show of impatience. "It would be impossible for me to credit you with any kindly intentions, so far as they might relate to me."

Cushman smiled somewhat grimly, and went on in a steadier voice:

"I have postponed action for a very good and sufficient reason, my dear Lodestone! We're not in love with each other, and it's no use to pretend that we are."

Lodestone still toyed nervously with the letter.

"You are aware, certainly, that Barnum Yates has sold to us his information. It is very important information, too. Its nature was indicated by me last night."

"Then you lied about that telegram?" with flashing eyes. "I thought as much at the time,

and have been about convinced of it by your inaction since."

"I put off action purposely," avoiding this direct thrust, "until I could have another talk with you. The knowledge that Yates furnished us is enough to bring about your ruin. And I have come to say that we will withhold it only on certain conditions."

"I'm not at all in a mood for parleying, Mr. Cushman. So I'll have to say to you, as I said to the tramp, 'Crack your whip!'"

Cushman shifted nervously, and remained silent for a moment, with his keen eyes fixed on his defiant adversary; and Lodestone took the opportunity to tear open the envelope and glance at the letter. An unwonted light sprung into his eyes, as he saw the nature of its contents.

It was from Noe Skelton, the San Francisco detective, and concerned Adeline Ridges.

He made sure of this, and then slowly read it over.

The letter called Lodestone's attention to the fact that he had caused investigations to be made regarding the past of this woman, and inquired if she was in Silver Hill. She was wanted on a charge of murder; and the facts so far as known were recited. It appeared that she had left San Francisco in company with another woman about the same time of her coming to Silver Hill. This other woman had since remained missing; and her relatives, becoming alarmed about her, suspected foul play, and had sought the detective to look into the subject. Skelton desired Lodestone to communicate with him at once, and give him a complete account of the recent acts of Miss Bridges.

This communication was intensely suggestive. Lodestone knew, now, that Lillie Cushman had not been killed, but he had been unable to make that discovery agree with the finding of the body in the canyon. Now, it flashed on him that the body found must be that of the missing woman spoken of by Skelton. The mystery was clearing away a little.

It did not explain everything, however, and he had not time just then to try to give cohesion to his facts.

He turned again to Cushman, with a whirling brain.

The latter had been watching him closely; and, seeing that the letter was not of common import, was wondering what it contained.

Lodestone was almost on the point of reading it aloud to him and making direct inquiries concerning Lillie, but his judgment restrained him.

As carelessly as possible he refolded the letter, restored it to its envelope, and returned it to one of his pockets.

"Haden't you better think twice about that, Lodestone?" was Cushman's urgent inquiry.

"About what?" the letter excluding everything else from his thoughts.

"That compromise, of course! Don't you think it would be wisest to drop this fight, even at this stage of it, and keep this Colby matter an entire secret by so doing?"

Lodestone knew that the letter put a counterclub into his own hands; but he was not sure how he could best use it, and he wanted time for thought. He also wanted time to communicate with his brother.

"I don't know about it," he declared, shifting his base of defense. "I don't want to be arrested, of course."

Cushman felt sure that Lodestone was wavering; and he again set forth the case urgently.

"I'll tell you what!" and Lodestone looked firmly at him. "You come in again to-morrow and I'll give you my answer. In the morning I'll give the thing careful thought. Will that do?"

Cushman hesitated. He was fearful of losing what he conceived to be an advantage, and on the other hand it did not seem wise to press for an immediate answer.

"I'll agree to it," he said at length, rising to depart.

## CHAPTER XII.

### LUMPKINS'S SCHEME.

JOHN CUSHMAN was no sooner out of the office, than Lodestone drew the letter from his pocket and again carefully read it.

The doubts in his mind were growing into certainties. He now felt positive that the body of the woman found in the canyon was that of the missing woman mentioned in this letter, and he was equally certain she had been slain by Adeline Ridges, or at her instigation.

The missing woman had left San Francisco in Adeline's company, and she had in her possession at the time a considerable sum of money and some jewels. The motive for the murder—if there had been one—was supposed to be the obtaining of these jewels and money.

From all he had learned of her, Lodestone could not doubt but Adeline Ridges would be fully equal to this crime.

He resolved to investigate the subject, communicate his information to Skelton, and co-operate with him in bringing Adeline to justice.

He put the letter in his pocket once more, and left the office with the intention of calling on Judge Lumpkins.



He encountered Frisco Ben on the stairway, however; and when Frisco stated that he had something of importance to say, Lodestone re-entered the room with him.

"I've been pokin' the gold dollars into the fist o' that maid over at Cushman's, an' a-tryin' to find out somethin'," was Frisco's declaration, when they were closeted together.

"You have heard news of Lillie!" excitedly.

The ex-cowboy sorrowfully shook his head.

"I only wisht I could say I had!" he averred.

"Tain't nothin' of that kind. But I've found out somethin' that may be of interest concernin' Adeline Ridges an' John Cushman."

"Cushman has just been here."

Frisco did not heed the interruption.

"I've found out that Mrs. Cushman is p'izen jealous o' them two, an' that she's a-watchin' 'em all the time. She's that jealous, the maid says, she can hardly sleep o' nights; and her an' Cushman have jist had the biggest row on record about it. Affairs air gittin' hot over there."

Frisco had rightly judged that this might be a matter worthy of attention.

"I'm obliged to you, Ben, for findin' that out. Likely it can be made useful. Now, I'm going to see Lumpkins. I shall tell him about it and about this letter."

He took it out and permitted Frisco to read it. To the cowboy the news it held was startling.

"That puts the cinch on old Cushman!" he exclaimed, giving his thigh a gleeful slap. "Jist draw that on him, an' you can keep him as quiet as a mouse. I 'low he's beginnin' to think a powerful sight o' that there Adeline Ridges, an' he'll do 'most anything to pect her."

Judge Simon Lumpkins thought the same, when he was called on by Lodestone Lem and the matter placed before him.

"It gives you the whip-hand, now, to borrow the tramp's expression!" he said, caressing his smooth face with one of his fat palms. "I'd use that, Lodestone! Use it for all it's worth!"

Lumpkins was quite as unscrupulous as the average politician, never hesitating at any means to attain his ends.

"You mean, go to Cushman with it? But would that be just right, Lumpkins? This is a private communication, and no authority is given me to reveal the secret it contains. If I should go with it to Cushman, would not that defeat Skelton's objects?"

"It might," Lumpkins confessed. "But what of it? The Alcatraz land question is of paramount importance, and you can't afford to have your brother arrested, or to be arrested yourself."

"Now, if I were you, I'd go straight to this Adeline Ridges; and I'd acquaint her with the nature of my discoveries, and inform her that if she does not draw Cushman off she will be exposed to arrest and punishment."

"That will not do away with the charges against her, will it? She can be arrested at any time afterward, or whenever Skelton desires it to be done. It seems to me you would be shielding yourself and injuring no one."

Lodestone really desired to see Adeline Ridges. Not so much for the purpose of carrying out this plan of Lumpkins's, but in the hope of betraying from her the secret of Miss Cushman's present whereabouts. It did not seem possible that Cushman could be ignorant of his daughter's movements; and it was safe to assume that whatever information he had concerning her, Adeline also possessed.

"I can't say that I like the scheme," was Lodestone's thoughtful comment. "But I'll call on the young woman and see what comes of it."

"It's the only sensible thing to do!" Lumpkins shouted after him. "And take my advice, now, and do it. You've got the whip-hand! Keep it!"

Lodestone could not help feeling that it was a bit of presumptuous impudence for him to even think of calling on Adeline Ridges at that time. He did not let this deter him, however, and bent his way toward Cushman's residence.

Adeline was evidently surprised, and there was a lurking fear in her expressive countenance, when she saw who the caller was. With an affected cordiality she invited him into the parlor, when he made known his wish to see her for a few moments alone.

"I'm really delighted to see you!" she asserted, lying with smooth glibness. "Such a time as we're having here, anyway! It seems to me I never was in such a whirl of excitement!"

Lodestone was in a wavering frame of mind, and found himself in a condition very uncommon to him: at a loss for words.

Adeline Ridges had not lost the old feeling of love for him, although it had been recently greatly tempered and modified by fear. Opposed by him at every turn, she yet found herself admiring his fighting abilities, and at times almost pinning him as a hero. She thrilled a little under the earnest glance he bent on her, and the warm blood rushed in a torrent to her dark cheeks.

Lodestone could not be wholly unaware of the feelings which possessed her, and the temptation to use them to his own advantage was strong. But how could he use them? The letter in his

pocket almost seemed to burn him, so anxious was he to speak of it, as he tried to reply to her airy words.

"It was a great fight," he declared, his eyes kindling at the memory, "and John Cushman is a smart fellow; but I fancy I got ahead of him a little!"

"If only this dreadful business could have been arranged without all this turmoil!" and she clasped her hands in her lap and surveyed him regretfully. "It was terrible! I enjoyed it somewhat, while the battle was on. It stirred my blood and made me forgetful of a good many things that seemed useless to remember! But I do wish it might have been different!"

The things useless to remember consisted almost wholly of her unrequited love for Lodestone's self, though Lodestone gave it quite a different meaning. His mind recurred at once to the detective's communication.

They talked on and on, in a hesitating strain, neither feeling entirely at ease. Lodestone could not convince himself that it would be right to follow Lumpkins's plans, nor could he drift the conversation to Lillie Cushman.

He felt that the visit availed him nothing, and feeling thus, left the house. He had not explained the cause of his visit, and there was something in his face that made her hesitate to press him on that point.

He went back to Lumpkins to confess his failure; and soon after sent a letter and a telegram to his brother.

He also, during the day, replied to Skelton's communication, giving the detective all the information in his possession and assuring him of his willing co-operation.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### IN HYMEN'S NET.

NOTWITHSTANDING that he could not bring himself to question Adeline Ridges, Lodestone Lem did not cease his search for Lillie Cushman. He worked persistently and determinedly, but without method, and without result.

Frisco Ben was equally diligent and equally unsuccessful.

Frisco had other matters on his mind, however, tending to great distraction. Miss Sophie Slater was residing in Carson City, and, since coming there, Frisco had been an almost constant visitor at her place of abode.

Frisco's calls on Lodestone had recently partaken of a startling character, and the one he made that evening was no exception.

"I'm a-goin' to git married!" he said, abruptly, looking somewhat sheepish, as his tall form collapsed into the depths of one of the big chairs. "Me'n' Sophie has been a-talkin' the thing over, an' we've j'intly 'riv' at the conclusion that it ain't good for a man ner a woman to live alone. We've become orthodox on that p'int."

Another mail had come in bringing another letter, which Lodestone had read with an interest altogether different from that with which he read the other. If Frisco had not been so engrossed in his own affairs, he would have noticed that a shade of heavy sadness lingered on the countenance of his friend. His mind, however, was so filled with thoughts of Sophie, and of the near approach of his union with her, that it scarcely contained room for anything else.

Lodestone was not surprised at the announcement. He had anticipated it for a long time.

"Allow me to congratulate you!" he said, approaching the ex-cowboy with extended hand, but with barely a perceptible lifting of the somber look. "When is the happy event to take place?"

"To-night!" very joyously, but with a foolish chuckle intended to hide his embarrassment. "Hang it all, I wish it could be a double one! It might be, too, if only we could find that sweet-heart o' yours! I've come to ask you if you won't come over to the house an' be my best man. I don't know anybody I'd like for that duty better than you. Sophie's sister is a-goin' to stand up with her, an' of course I've got to rustle somebody o' the male persuasion for my side o' the house."

He had got his tongue, now, and was plunging along at breathless speed, not giving Lodestone a chance to reply.

"We're goin' to live hyer in Carson. Sophie's picked out what she calls 'jist a love of a house,' an' I can git a job down at the Red Lion livery-stable if I want it. She wants to live hyer 'cause her sister's hyer: an' as for me, I don't know as it makes any difference, unless—"

"Unless what?"

Lodestone spoke rather absent-mindedly, though he was trying hard to appear greatly interested.

"Unless you should have big need of me ag'in back at Chestnut Burr. But, if you should, I reckon I could run down there an' give ye a lift; an' if you jist couldn't git along without me, I 'low we could move. Sophie says she jist won't, but I 'low—"

"That's all right!" was Lodestone's kind assurance. "You're the very best friend I ever had, Ben, and, of course, I shall miss you. You could come down there, as you say, if I should

need you badly; but if your wife—that-is-to-be prefers to live here, and there's nothing more than that to prevent it, I think you ought to accede to her wishes."

Ben's face flushed with pleasure.

"I knowed you'd be square on that subjec'!" was his enthusiastic declaration. "I'll go down an' hire to the livery men to-morrow."

Lodestone had put away the saddening letter, and hesitated whether he should speak of it in view of the effect it might have on his friend's happiness.

"I'm not just in the mood for merry-making," he said. "But I'll be at the wedding and do as you wish. I owe you that, Ben, for the many kindnesses you've done me. I wish you and Sophie all the joy it is possible for you to have; and when you are established at housekeeping, I'm sure you'll let me show my good-will in another way."

Ben supposed he alluded to the mystery surrounding Lillie Cushman, and that the closing words indicated a desire to present to him and Sophie some handsome present. He was correct in the last surmise, but not in the first; as he discovered when Lodestone drew out the letter.

"I don't want to disturb your happiness, Ben, but I'm almost under obligations to inform you of the sad news that reached me only a little while ago. My unfortunate brother is dead. He had been failing for a long time, but I was not quite prepared for the suddenness of his departure."

The envelope and letter-paper were bordered with heavy black, and Ben gazed at them with stupefaction. When he had recovered a little, he gasped his surprise, and took the letter which Lodestone was extending to him.

It was dated at San Francisco, and ran as follows:

"LEMUEL BURTON, ESQ. :—

"DEAR SIR:—I have to communicate to you the sad news of the death of your brother, Silas Burton. He was brought to this institution yesterday in a very low condition, having been discovered wandering in the streets in a delirium occasioned by fever. We did what we could for him, but this morning he expired. One of our employes thought he recognized him and gave his name as Ezra Tanner; but your brother returned to consciousness a short time before his death, and during that lucid interval, informed me that his name was Silas Burton, and that he had a brother, Lemuel Burton, who was a member of the Nevada Legislature, and residing for a time in Carson City; and he desired me to write to you of his demise. According to his wish, we did not trouble you until he had been buried. I am not sure that we did right in this, but it is hard to viol the expressed wish of a dying man. And so I write you now, at this first opportunity. We have his clothing and the few effects he had on his person when he was brought here. They are at your disposal. Very respectfully yours,

"STEVEN SIMPSON, M. D.,  
Supt. of Pacific Coast Hospital."

"Deaths an' weddin's a-crowdin' side by side!" said Ben, sympathetically and almost tearfully, his face showing how the news touched him. "It makes me sorry I said anything about that other business."

Lodestone dropped the letter on the table and bowed his head in his hands.

"It was a hard fate!" he declared, looking up after a little. "However much he may have sinned in that unfortunate Colby matter, it seems to me he suffered more than enough to expiate it all. His life was a constant fear, and I can't doubt that death was a relief to him. I helped him all I could, and it gives me some satisfaction now, to know that I did. I haven't a doubt that his death was due solely to the bounding and annoyance to which he has lately been subjected."

There was a harsh glitter in the tear-stained eyes which he lifted to his friend, caused by this reflection. The belief that Yates and Cushman were indirectly the authors of his brother's untimely taking-off could not tend to make him feel more kindly toward them.

"I shall go down to Frisco soon," he continued, "visit the hospital and his grave, and look after the few things he may have left. I don't see, though, that haste would avail anything, now; and for the present I shall remain here in Carson."

"That'll change the outlook ginerally, won't it?" Frisco asked, thinking of the effect of Silas Burton's death. "Yates an' old John Cushman an' t'other fellers won't have nothin' to run after you about, now, an' threaten ye with. If they was the cause of it, seems to me they'll git paid back in a measure. It takes all the weapons out o' their hands."

The cowboy spoke truly in this, though the thought advanced was not new to Lodestone, who had duly reflected on it.

It was difficult to return from this sorrowful question to a discussion of the approaching nuptials; and when the subject was again broached, Ben was inclined to insist that Lodestone should remain away from the wedding altogether.

"I've promised!" said Lodestone, "and there's nothing of harm in a marriage celebration. It really ought to be a very solemn occasion of itself."

"That's so," Frisco confessed. "I s'pose it ought; but instead o' that, it makes me feel as frisky as a young colt. I 'low the solemnness 'll



come when Sophie cracks me over the head with the bread roller!"

The wedding that night at the residence of Sophie's sister was a very quiet affair, only a few friends of the parties interested being present. But it was none the less joyful and pleasant for that; and Lodestone, whose popularity had given him invitations to many similar events, felt, as he walked quietly away from the house when it was all over, that two better-hearted or more whole-souled people had never been united in the bonds of matrimony.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### LILLIE CUSHMAN.

WHEN John Cushman called the next morning to get Lodestone's answer to his proposition, he was shown the letter from the superintendent of the Pacific Coast Hospital. There could be no doubt of its genuineness, and it took all the wind out of Cushman's sails.

Cushman had not been very confident of success on coming there, and was very uneasy besides. Adeline Ridges had received a vaguely-worded message from one of her San Francisco acquaintances. It gave no details, but was meant to warn her that the minions of the law were on her track. Cushman had been using the telegraph to get more definite information.

His anxiety for Adeline's safety was great, and therefore he did not feel in any good mood as he returned to the street with Lodestone's defiance ringing in his ears.

He began to see that all hope of obtaining the Alcatraz lands was rapidly vanishing. If Lodestone could defeat him in the Legislature, he could also defeat him when the time came to examine into the judge's record. Cushman had bitterly contested every foot of ground, but he began to feel, now, that further battling was useless. He knew he had failed. The last chance had been stricken away by that letter announcing the death of Silas Burton.

Lodestone Lem was in no mood for self-glorification and joy, though he felt himself to be the victor. He was saddened by the news of his brother's death, and distressed beyond measure by his inability to find any trace of Lillie Cushman.

He did not discontinue his efforts, however, and that night, while feverishly pacing one of the streets, he again saw the face and figure he had beheld amid the crush in the gallery.

She had come from one street and was crossing to another, hurrying along at a rapid gait. He called to her, but she did not seem to hear him, and although he called again, she continued straight on.

He believed she heard, however, for there was a slight quickening of her footsteps.

His pulses were bounding tumultuously, and his brain was again in a whirl. He scarcely knew what he did, but ran after her, in an endeavor to overtake her and speak with her face to face.

Before he could come up with her, she entered a vehicle and was driven rapidly away.

There were no regular cabs in Carson, but he climbed into the nearest buggy, and, by a liberal fee, persuaded the driver to go in pursuit of the fleeing carriage.

The buggy gained on the carriage, but it did not overtake it; and was a hundred yards or more in the rear when Lillie Cushman descended and turned toward a large white house that stood within spacious grounds.

The carriage disappeared before Lodestone's vehicle could reach it, thus denying Lodestone the privilege of speaking to the driver. It is doubtful if he would have taken time, had the opportunity been given, for the girl was vanishing in the shadows of the trees near the house.

"What place is this?" he asked of the man beside him, and was told that it was a private boarding-school for young ladies.

Although night the hour was not late, yet no light shone from any of the windows of the big building.

"You remain here until I return," he said to the driver.

Then he stopped.

"Perhaps I'd better pay you for what you've done, for there's no telling how long I may stay in there. If I don't come out in a half-hour, you may drive away."

"Accordin' to my idee, you won't git in at all," pocketing the fee with an air of satisfaction. "I hear that the folks in there air very partic'lar how they let men-folks come around, specially at night."

Lodestone did not remain for further explanations, but hurried up the broad walk to the house. By this time the girl had vanished, and he naturally supposed she had gone in by the front way.

He gave the bell-knob an excited jerk, and heard the far-away tinkle of the bell. There was no immediate answer, and he rung again; then he caught the gleam of a lamp, and heard slipped feet descending a stairway. Shortly after the door opened, and an elderly woman appeared before him.

He had not been able to frame the words of

his intended inquiry, and stumbled sadly as he tried to explain what he wanted. He managed to say, however, that he had seen a young lady on the street, whom he believed to be Miss Lillie Cushman, and that she had come there, and he should like to speak a few words with her. Was Miss Lillie Cushman there?

The lady, who was probably one of the preceptors, was much surprised, and possibly mortified, to know that one of the inmates had been out in the streets at so late an hour. It was a violation of the rules, and a thing not to be tolerated.

Lodestone realized he had blundered, but it was too late to retreat. Besides, his impatience mercilessly spurred him on.

He repeated his question: Was Miss Lillie Cushman there?

She was, and was an inmate of the institution; but she could not be allowed to see a gentleman at that hour. The rule was stringent, and could not be set in abeyance under any consideration.

In vain Lodestone pleaded. He might as well have essayed to move a heart of stone. The elderly lady was inflexible—even obstinate. She felt injured by his call, and the character of his demand. It seemed a violation of the proprieties and a reflection on the character of the institution. No; he could not see the young lady!

He was forced to depart with this answer. But he had accomplished one thing. He had proven to himself that he was not mistaken in thinking the young woman Lillie Cushman. That was a great point.

It was plain nothing could be done before morning, and he dismissed the buggy. He did not want to drive back to town. He wanted to walk and think. He took a few turns up and down the street, but always found himself returning to the point where he had seen Lillie dismount from the carriage. He could get a better view of the building there, and it did him good just to look at the house, and reflect that it sheltered Lillie Cushman.

He felt as if he should never desire to sleep, his nerves were at such a tension; and he tramped tirelessly up and down the thoroughfare, hour after hour, unable to tear himself away.

He had a feeling that it would not be safe to leave the place. That something might happen to keep him from seeing her again, should he depart. She had disappeared once so mysteriously that it seemed only natural to expect her to do so again. All in all the circumstances were so peculiar and strange, that sometimes he scarcely knew whether he was waking or dreaming.

He was unconscious of fatigue throughout the long hours, although he remained there until the coming of day.

Afterward, he was glad that this species of temporary insanity led him to so persistently haunt the place, for he saw two figures emerge from the house in the gray of the early morning. They came toward the front gate; and he gave a start of intense surprise when he saw that they were John Cushman and Lillie!

He was some distance down the street at the time, and he was still a considerable distance away, when they gained the street. He recalled the fact that he had not seen Cushman enter the grounds, and jumped to the quick conclusion that he had gone in by the rear way.

Cushman and his daughter were walking rapidly. Cushman carried a heavy valise, and Lillie had a shawl or garment of some kind thrown over her arm. It was plain they were leaving the house, perhaps for good!

Lodestone became possessed of a wild and sudden fear. If he allowed them to disappear now, he might never get to see her again.

A man came hurrying up the sidewalk, but in spite of this, Lodestone ran forward and shouted to Cushman and his daughter.

The approaching day had not yet driven away all of the gloom.

Cushman gave a quick glance in Lodestone's direction. He saw two figures hastening toward him, one shouting loudly and incoherently.

His face took on an ashen pallor; and—strangest of all strange things!—he dropped the valise, and, abandoning Lillie, sped swiftly up the street.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### UNTANGLING THE SKRIN.

LILLIE CUSHMAN stared after her father in utter bewilderment. She had not recognized Lodestone and did not recognize him until he gained her side.

The explanation of John Cushman's strange conduct is simple enough, and may as well be inserted here.

Lodestone in writing to Skelton, the detective, had spoken of Cushman's intimacy with Adeline Ridges, and of certain other facts which naturally led Skelton to believe that Cushman was Adeline's accomplice in the killing of the missing girl. The finding of the body in the canyon and the strange acts connected with it had all been told to Skelton.

Having pushed his investigations to a point that seemed to justify action, Skelton telegraph-

ed the marshal of Carson City, requesting him to cause the immediate arrest of the two suspected persons, stating he would come by the first train, himself, to take charge of them.

This message was sent late on the night which witnessed Lodestone's wild chase after Lillie Cushman; and, as it chanced, Barnum Yates was lounging lazily in the depot waiting-room which adjoined the telegraph office, when the message was received. He caught the import of it at once, and saw how important it was that Cushman should have immediate notice of it.

Cushman had come down handsomely with his bribe money, and had not been compensated therefor in the outcome, and Yates in consideration of this held for him something of a kindly interest.

Yates got out of the waiting-room as quickly as he could, and sought Cushman, at the latter's residence, and communicated his startling bit of information.

Cushman was even then making secret preparations to leave the country, thinking it the best thing he could do. He had failed in his fight against Lodestone, was madly in love with Adeline Ridges, and Mrs. Cushman's jealousy was making his life unendurable.

Adeline, fearing the results of her crime, was anxious to shake from her feet the dust of Carson City, and the two had arranged to fly together.

The tramp's information did not change their plans; it only hastened them.

There was an early train out of Carson for the East, and they meant to go on that. For reasons which were afterward discovered, he desired Lillie to accompany them, and that was why he took her at such an unseemly hour from the boarding school.

In approaching the grounds, he saw Lodestone walking down the street, but he did not recognize him and supposed he would continue on his way. He entered the grounds by the rear entrance to avoid detection by this seeming stranger.

When he came out with Lillie, by the front way, and beheld Lodestone rushing toward him, shouting to him to stop, and also saw the other man, he believed they were two officers coming to effect his arrest and so dropped the valise and darted away with all speed.

Lillie Cushman was still staring after her father in a dazed way, when Lodestone came up to her.

"It is you, Miss Cushman?" he said, not able to conceal his joy. "I have been looking for you for—for—well, ever since—ever since you disappeared so strangely from your father's house at Silver Hill."

She flushed with pleasure, and looked helplessly at him and at the valise at her feet.

"It seems your father has departed! Had we—had we not better return to the house? I am anxious to speak with you for a few moments, anyway. You can explain a good many things that I'd like to know."

She was blushing now, like a full-blown rose, and was evidently in doubt what to do.

The stranger had passed, staringly, and Lodestone now picked up the heavy valise.

"Perhaps we had better return to the building," the girl admitted, not liking the way the man had looked at her. "But, I don't understand what father meant by—by—"

"He may be back in a little while!" and Lodestone moved toward the walk.

The girl still hesitated, but she finally accompanied him to the house. They were soon admitted, being stared at, however, almost as strangely as by the man.

Lillie informed the matron that they desired to wait in the parlor until her father's return; and when this was consented to, they were shown to that room.

There could be no doubt that she was glad to meet Lodestone. She was too frank and ingenuous to try to conceal it; and any one not so blinded as Lodestone would quickly have seen that she was quite as much in love with him as he was with her.

She responded promptly to his questions, though continually interjecting suppositions concerning her father's queer conduct. It was plain she had no knowledge of his evil doings.

Her replies to his inquiries showed she had not been willing to come to this boarding-school, and that she had been forced from her home in the night, and had screamed out and fought against it. She saw no occasion for being made to leave home in this surreptitious manner. A young woman, unknown to her, (but afterward known to the reader as Adeline Ridges) had come to the house that day; but to her there seemed no connection between this coming and her own sudden removal. For lack of proper opportunity, she had not mentioned Lodestone's visit.

She did not know, until Lodestone told her, that this woman had taken on the name of Lillie Cushman, although she had seen mention of this Lillie Cushman in the few Carson papers that chanced to stray into the boarding-school. She had inquired of her father once, concerning it, and he had informed her that this Lillie Cushman was a cousin of hers who was visiting awhile with the family.



The real reason of the substitution of Adeline Ridges for Lillie Cushman at the Silver Hill house lay in the fact that John Cushman feared he could not manipulate Lillie as he desired. As for after explanations, which would some time become necessary, he fancied they could be easily made when occasion demanded.

The papers that drifted from time to time into the boarding-school had been eagerly perused by the fair young girl. From them she learned of Lodestone's elevation to the Legislature, and of the fight in progress between his faction and the Land Pirates. From them, too, she learned of the speech which Lodestone was to continue at the night session of the lower house; and she had slipped out and made her way to the gallery for the sole purpose of hearing it.

When she saw she was discovered by him, she got out of the building with all speed and returned to the boarding-school, fearing her father's displeasure. He had strictly commanded her to remain in the seclusion of the school, and had impressed similar instructions on the matron.

When seen the second time by Lodestone, she was returning from a surreptitious visit made to a girl friend; and had been so frightened when she heard her name called in the street, that she had secured the first accessible carriage to return her with all haste to the school.

These things, and many more, Lodestone learned; imparting on his side a great deal of information of which she had not dreamed.

He told her how he had thought her dead, and of the body of the unknown woman found in the canyon; and much more to the same effect.

He also informed her of the recent marriage of Frisco Ben to Sophie Slater.

In fact, Lodestone became almost garrulously happy in his narrations, and the time traveled with winged feet.

Some laughing remark of hers emboldened him.

He stooped and kissed her hand; and then, almost before he knew it, he was on his knees before her, tongue-tied and with face aflame.

"You ought to understand the meaning of all I have said," he stammered. "You do, Lillie! I know you do! I can see it in your face. The meaning is, that I love you—have loved you ever since I saw you that morning at your home near Silver Hill!"

She opened her lips as if to speak, but no words came forth, though her bosom heaved tumultuously. She lifted a hand, whether to wave him away or to cover her face, he did not know. He seized it and drew her to him.

She did not resist, although at first she seemed about to struggle.

"I love you!" he whispered, over and over again. "I love you!"

She received this declaration with a gasping sob.

"Have I been foolish in doing so?" he persisted.

"Was I foolish in trying to find you?"

"No!" she made answer, in the softest of murmurs. "I am glad you found me, Mr. Burton. I, too, loved you from the first, and I was very miserable because of it, when I had to leave home. Now, you have made me very, very happy!"

## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE SKEIN UNTANGLED.

LODESTONE was in a dream of rapturous delight. These words from the woman he loved enthroned Heaven in his heart. He caught her to him again and smothered her face in kisses, and it seemed as if he could never let her go.

He had so long mourned for her in a hopeless, despairing way; so long dreamed of her as dead, that he almost feared to release her from his arms. To know that this woman loved him, to hear the sweet words from her own warm lips, was a happiness he had scarcely dared hope for. So pleasurable was the sensation, that he made her whisper them over and over again.

When they felt they could no longer remain in the parlor without attracting undue censure from the inmates of the school, they began to think of what they should now do.

It was plain Cushman did not mean to return, and the day was already advancing.

Lillie disliked to take her old place in the school, as her strange coming back would occasion no end of remarks. She was thinking of going to her father's residence, even against Lodestone's wishes, when some men approached the school, and conversed excitedly with the matron, on being admitted to the corridor.

Lillie and Lodestone were not long in discovering that these men were officers, and that they were seeking John Cushman for the purpose of arresting him. He had been seen by some one in that vicinity.

They learned, too, that Cushman had supposedly left town in company with Adeline Ridges, and that Mrs. Cushman was in a jealous rage because of it. They were not sure, though, that Cushman was not in hiding, and they were still searching for him. Such of Cushman's acquaintances as had learned of his disappearance with Adeline naturally thought he had left in the company of his daughter, having been taught to regard her as such.

As soon as Lillie comprehended the nature of what was told her, she insisted on going home to see her mother, attended, of course, by Lodestone. She was received with a savage outburst of temper, and then was made to understand that she had no claim on the woman she had always believed to be her mother.

It was the first time she had ever been informed that she was not the child of John Cushman and his wife, and the shock of the news quite dazed her.

Mrs. Cushman appeared to be angry with all the world.

"You shall not come here!" was her spiteful exclamation. "You have no claim on me, and I tell you you shall not come here! You have always been a hateful little minx!"

Lillie's tears flowed freely, as she listened to those cutting words. It was like being driven from home; and, although Mrs. Cushman had not been one of the kindest of mothers, Lillie found it hard to disabuse her mind of the belief that she was her mother.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she moaned, wringing her hands in her bitter grief.

"You spoke of a girl friend whom you visited last evening," suggested Lodestone. "Why not go there, temporarily? Or you can go to a hotel. But remember"—and he bent his face low over hers and looked her in the eyes—"I shall insist that you go to a house of our own, very soon. It seems you have no home, and I shall take the privilege, and be the happiest of men to provide you with one. A home for you and me!"

She smiled at him, even through her tears, and answered by a gentle and trustful pressure of the hand.

Lillie Cushman's girl friend was full of pity for her forlorn fate, and welcomed her, kindly. Lillie felt she could rest there, and be in a measure content.

The surprises of the day were not at an end, however. News was received, that for a time was almost crushing to Lillie.

John Cushman and Adeline Ridges had escaped the vigilance of the officers and taken the early train for the East. The tramp, Barnum Yates, was aboard of the same train, though whether bound for the same destination, was never known. A terrible accident had occurred near a small station in the mountains.

The train was derailed, and had plunged down a steep embankment, demolishing the coaches and killing and maiming a number of the passengers. Among the dead were John Cushman, Adeline Ridges, and Barnum Yates. Swift and awful vengeance had overtaken them, even as they believed themselves flying in safety from it. It was a dreadful ending of wicked lives.

It was not known till long afterward—and Cushman's private papers furnished the revelation—that he and his wife had taken an infant, since grown into the woman known as Lillie Cushman, and had reared it as a member of their family. They had been induced to do this by a hope of wealth, though at the time the hope was somewhat dim and shadowy.

Afterward the adopted child came into a considerable amount of money by inheritance. She was deceived, however, and kept in ignorance of it, while John Cushman endeavored to possess it as his own. It was this desire to secure her money which induced the attempt to take her with him from the boarding-school.

Investigations which quickly succeeded the great railroad accident, revealed that John Cushman had a guilty acquaintance with Adeline Ridges before her visit to Silver Hill. She came there at his invitation, though sooner than he had anticipated, and the murder of Adeline's companion was accomplished while making the trip through the hills from the railway.

The body of the unfortunate woman thus cruelly slain was recovered by her relatives and removed to San Francisco, where a monument was erected to her memory.

No doubt the reader can guess the rest.

The marriage of Lemuel Burton and Lillie Rushton—as was her real name—soon followed, and that it has proved one of the happiest of unions, is known to every one who has the pleasure of their acquaintance.

Lodestone Lem won in his great fight against the Land Pirates—very little fight being made after Cushman's death—and the subsequent history of Chestnut Burr showed it to be worthy of the faith of its champion.

THE END.

## Beadle's Dime Library.

### BY WM. G. PATTEN.

- 689 The Sparkler Sharp.
- 676 Hurricane Hal, the Cowboy Hotspur.
- 669 Old True Blue, the Trusty.
- 663 The Giant Sport; or, Sold to Satan.
- 656 Old Plug Ugly, the Rough and Ready.
- 648 Gold Glove Gid, the Man of Grit.
- 641 Aztec Jack, the Desert Nomad.
- 631 Colonel Cool, the Santa Fe Sharp.
- 602 Captain Nameless, the Mountain Mystery.
- 571 Old Dismal, the Range Detective.
- 545 Hustler Harry, the Cowboy Sport.

### BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

- 267 The White Squaw.
- 234 The Hunter's Feast.
- 228 The Maroon. A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah.
- 218 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter.
- 213 The War Trail; or, The Hunt of the Wild Horse.
- 208 The White Chief. A Romance of Mexico.
- 200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
- 74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Lake Queen.
- 66 The Specter Barque. A Tale of the Pacific.
- 55 The Scalp Hunters. A Romance of the Plains.
- 12 The Death-Shot; or, Tracked to Death.
- 8 The Headless Horseman.

### BY OLL COOMES.

- 619 Kit Bandy & Co, the Border Detectives.
- 148 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter.
- 137 Long Beard, the Giant Spy.
- 99 The Giant Rifleman; or, Wild Camp Life.
- 51 Red Rob, the Boy Road-Agent.
- 48 Idaho Tom, the Young Outlaw of Silverland.
- 46 Bowie-Knife Ben, the Nor'west Hunter.
- 44 Old Dan Rackback, the Great Extremator.
- 43 Dakota Dan, the Reckless Ranger.
- 7 Death-Notch, the Destroyer.

### BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 643 Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter.
- 616 Magnus, the Weird Detective.
- 606 The Drop Detective.
- 595 Wellborn, the Upper Crust Detective.
- 582 Joram, the Detective Expert.
- 574 Old Falcon's Double.
- 561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Foe.
- 548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
- 536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Detective's Swell Job.
- 515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
- 509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
- 501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
- 494 The Detective's Spy.
- 485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
- 477 Dead-arm Brandt.
- 467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
- 462 The Circus Detective.
- 451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
- 444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
- 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.

### BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER.

- 614 The Showman Detective; or, The Mad Magician.
- 609 The Texas Tramp; or, Solid Saul.
- 445 Journeyman John, the Champion.
- 412 Larry Locke, the Man of Iron.
- 406 Old Pop Hicks, Showman.
- 378 John Armstrong, Mechanic.
- 326 The Whitest Man in the Mines.
- 310 The Marshal of Satanstown; or, The League.
- 303 Top-Notch Tom, the Cowboy Outlaw.
- 295 Old Cross-Eye, the Maverick-Hunter.
- 280 The Lost Corvette; or, Blakeley's Last Cruise.
- 284 The Three Frigates; or, Old Ironsides' Revenge.
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